The labour of feminist performance: postfeminism, authenticity, and celebrity in contemporary representations of girlhood on screen

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the labour that is made visible by the individual on-screen performances of five distinct postfeminist identities from contemporary popular culture. Each chapter focuses on one of three texts: the English-language film adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011); *The Hunger Games* film adaptations (2012-2015); and HBO's cable-television series, *Girls* (2012-2017); as well as the girl figures at the centre of them: Lisbeth Salander; Katniss Everdeen/ Jennifer Lawrence; and Lena Dunham/ Hannah Horvath. In these analyses I identify two marked strands of work acting as a conceptual thread that harnesses the potential of these gendered performances: firstly, the narrative, thematic, aesthetic, and representational work of the texts, which complicate current ideological and conceptual understandings of girlhood, feminism, and postfeminism; secondly, the cultural and ideological work of the magnetic identities of the girls at the centre of these texts, who help to bring these politics to the surface.

The texts and the performances that inform my analyses are often associated with feminism, although the value of this work is often contradictory in nature, both questioned and reinforced by virtue of the performative, creative labour that underpins their authentic, yet commodified, representations. In the case of Lawrence and Dunham, this concerns their work as celebrities and how they mediate feminist ideas through their branded performance. The main objective of this thesis, then, is to demonstrate how each of the identities in this corpus effectively open out the tensions involved in performing feminism in twenty-first century culture, and thus to render the gendered labour attendant with this as politically imperative towards current understandings. This is an interdisciplinary study, drawing on scholarship from film, media, celebrity, gender, and cultural studies in order to grapple with the complexities and myriad meanings of contemporary feminism in the broader context of media culture.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an examination of the labour made visible by the individual on-screen performances of five distinct postfeminist identities from contemporary popular culture. Each principal chapter focuses on one of three texts: the English-language film adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011); *The Hunger Games* film adaptations (2012-2015); and HBO's cable-television series, *Girls* (2012-2017); as well as the girls at the centre of them: Lisbeth Salander; Katniss Everdeen/ Jennifer Lawrence; and Lena Dunham/ Hannah Horvath.

As I will touch on in more detail in this introductory chapter, the discursive meanings attached to 'girl' are problematically bound up with 'postfeminist media culture's infantilization of women' (Projansky 2014: 20; see also Tasker and Negra 2007: 18). Recent conversations in more popular spheres have questioned the term, criticising its use, as well as challenging the link between girlhood and infantilization. Others have argued that such language contributes to the structural inferiority of women (Bialik 2017), as well as the stereotypical and sexist assumptions deeply engrained in our culture (Bates 2016). I am using 'girl' deliberately, therefore, to acknowledge the connotations attached to the figures I engage with in the thesis. The analyses presented here explicate the complicated relationships between particular performances of girlhood and the texts from which they originate, which complicate existing dichotomies such as masculinity and femininity, feminism and celebrity, the real and the mediated.

Specifically, in each chapter I identify two marked strands of work which act as a conceptual thread that harnesses the potential of these gendered performances: firstly, the narrative, thematic, aesthetic, and representational work of the texts themselves which complicate current ideological and conceptual understandings of girlhood, feminism, and postfeminism; secondly, the cultural and ideological work of the magnetic girl identities at the centre of these texts who help to bring these politics to the surface. Although both texts and characters are imbued with a feminist purpose, the value of the work that they do is often contradictory in nature, both questioned and reinforced by virtue of the

performative and creative labour of those who are responsible for their representation. My central argument is that these girls effectively open out the tensions involved in performing feminism in twenty-first century media culture, with each chapter ultimately refusing to dismiss the gendered labour attendant in these performances as inconsequential.

In making connections between these current representations of girls, or young women, and the wider media landscape of postfeminist popular culture, I demonstrate the ways in which the arguably iconic figures within each text present challenges for both of these realms through their performance. I argue that the performances of girlhood within each text – although products of mainstream franchising and branding – reveal how these particular girls stand for more complex ways of being in the world. As such, they are distinctive among the dominant representations in their wider postfeminist context. These analyses are rooted in the acknowledgement of popular culture as a key political site, defined by complex and contradictory meanings, pleasures, intertextuality, and relevance to everyday life (Fiske 1989: 120-27). As such, I approach each text from a culturally analytical perspective in order to understand the significance of the work that these individual performances are doing in relation to the complex terrain within which they are produced and consumed. All of these texts and the real/ fictional girls associated with them have achieved a high level of cultural renown, and my analyses map their successes; mining the ways in which these identities foreground and mediate the work of feminism in popular cultural sites: primarily film, television, and social media.

Principally, this thesis brings together case studies which demonstrate how feminist ideas are enabled and engaged within these popular cultural sites – and, more importantly, how these ideas exist in productive tension with postfeminist ideology. What I am concerned with, therefore, is how feminist identities are being negotiated in public, and what is at stake for feminism in such performances. This study contributes to several larger theoretical themes that are central to, and continuously in dialogue with, discourses of feminism, such as gender, gendered labour, celebrity, and postfeminism. Considered collectively, though, the texts explored here raise questions about the efficacy of a feminism that is forced to work within the boundaries of postfeminist media culture,

defined as it is by commercial intentions, commodified identities, raced and classed privilege, and an alleged absence of political engagement. The motivation for this research is rooted in the aim of understanding how these mediated performances draw out the imperfections of the texts of which they are part, but perhaps more importantly, to emphasise that each performance offers ambiguities that, speak to the changing parameters of feminism as it becomes increasingly popular – and increasingly visible – in the twenty-first century.

The 'Messiness' of Feminism: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and the Commodification of Girl Empowerment

The representations of the girls discussed in this thesis are constructed through narrative, image, bodies, and other elements of performance and subjectivity, which fervently oppose patriarchal structures and make spaces in which to foreground women. As such, the iconicity of each figure is steeped in both their identifications with feminism and the contexts from which they originate. Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander is a representation through which we see institutionalised misogyny at work, with her gender construction intentionally and explicitly communicating the feminist messages so tightly written into her literary origins in his *Millennium* series (2005-2007) of crime novels (Stenport and Alm 2009: 158). Similarly, Katniss Everdeen occupies the figurative role of the 'Mockingjay' in Suzanne Collins' post-apocalyptic universe in *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-2010) – acting as a powerful and affective symbol of the rebellion against a cruel, tyrannical and autocratic government. Finally, for Hannah Horvath, the central character in the HBO series *Girls*: while not so much positioned as a hero of millennial times than as a failure to live up to such an ideal, it is precisely Hannah's flaws that are at the root of what is considered to be, by some, a 'provocative version of feminist girlhood' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 253-56).

This thesis is partly a study of the fraught relationship between feminism and girlhood, as each of these girls display markers of a wider media culture that is increasingly cognisant of feminism but also increasingly accommodating of its problematic

popular inflections. In other words, these girls have come of age at a time defined by and through postfeminism. As such, I draw on established scholarship that examines postfeminism, largely in ways that draw out and expound its cultural and ideological contradictions. Indeed, postfeminism is often conceptualised in terms of its 'messiness'.

As Angela McRobbie argues in her seminal essay 'Post-feminism and popular culture', postfeminism is defined by an ultimate contradiction: the 'double entanglement' of feminist and anti-feminist ideas. Across various sites of popular culture, feminist work is both done and undone, 'taken into account' only to be repudiated (McRobbie 2004: 255-56). This is not a cultural terrain that is apolitical, however, but one where a *particular* politics is clearly at stake: 'postfeminist discourses rarely express the explicit view that feminist politics should be rejected; rather it is by virtue of feminism's success that it is seen to have been superseded' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 5). Indeed, this is not simply a 'backlash' against feminism as Susan Faludi (1992) importantly defined it, but a more insidious discourse that 'depends upon the selective incorporation of feminism for its efficacy' (Budgeon 2011: 281).

Postfeminism is also known to assume full economic freedom for women; emphasising professional and educational opportunities; freedom of choice with respect to work, domesticity, and parenting; as well as physical and sexual empowerment (Tasker and Negra 2007: 2). This freedom of choice, notions of 'being oneself' and 'pleasing oneself' are central to what Rosalind Gill terms 'postfeminism as sensibility' (2007a, 2007b). As part of 'a grammar of individualism', a 'messy suturing of traditional and neoliberal discourses' is made visible in Western media culture; presenting women as autonomous, empowered agents no longer constrained by inequalities or power imbalances (Gill 2007b: 153-54). Here, notions of politics and the social are almost entirely absent in favour of the personal in popular formats like news, talk shows, and reality TV, whereby 'every aspect of life is refracted through the idea of personal choice and self-determination' (Gill 2007b: 153). Further, the performance and intense self-work required to emulate a 'successful' version of femininity – slim, white, upper-class, conventionally (heterosexually) attractive, with a successful work/ life balance – is seen as

'offered' to women and presented as freely chosen (Gill 2007b: 154-55). Significantly, in ways that I will expound in this thesis, postfeminist culture interpellates along the lines of race and class, thus privileging a female subject who is 'white and middle class by default' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 3). Indeed, the girl identities that are focused on, here, contribute to the problematic cultural dominance of whiteness and privilege.

As Gill and Christina Scharff suggest elsewhere, there is a powerful resonance between this white, active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism, and the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism (2011: 7) – arguably both of which are female (Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b). 'Young women' especially are seen as integral to this subjectivity and thought to represent social change in late modernity (McRobbie 2000, McRobbie 2004). The subject-position of Anita Harris's 'can-do' girls, for example – who are 'flexible, individualized, resilient, self-driven, and self-made and who easily [follow] nonlinear trajectories to fulfilment and success' – depends on the idea that it is simply good choices, effort, and ambition alone which are responsible for one's success (Harris 2004: 16).

The conditions for this freedom, however, are seen by McRobbie to be contingent upon a 'withholding of critique' (2004: 260). The new female subject is 'called upon to be silent', thus remaining complicit with 'generationally specific notions of cool', occupying an uncritical position in relation to the dominance of 'commercially produced sexual representations which actively invoke hostility to assumed feminist positions from the past' so as to 'endorse a new regime of sexual meanings based on female consent, equality, participation and pleasure, free of politics' (McRobbie 2004: 260). Similarly, Imelda Whelehan's (2000) work argues that a new generation of feminism – one that casually claims clear victories while suggesting future efforts in the form of lifestyle choices and self-definition – is founded on forgotten, misrepresented milestones in feminism's past. Such retrospection consists of a nostalgic longing for an uncomplicated (read: pre-feminist) past, whereby 'retro-sexist' stereotypical media images of the 'girlie' and the 'lad' call up "harmless" and "fondly remembered" battles of the sexes through comedy and irony (2000: 15-76).

Natasha Walter (2010) uses the figuration of the 'living doll' to illustrate the equation of sexual allure with power as part of a wider culture wherein the trailblazing work of second wave feminism is seemingly eclipsed by hyper-sexualised versions of femininity that are taken as proof of women's growing freedoms and liberation.[1] These misrepresentations of its past have fuelled an, arguably on-going, antagonism towards feminism itself (McRobbie 2004, McRobbie 2009, Whelehan 2000, Walter 2010) that is now a familiar part of the messy postfeminist landscape. As this scholarship elucidates, the relationship between feminism and popular culture is manifestly a site of struggle, and one often acknowledged by academics and activists for how it fosters an 'evident erasure of feminist politics from the popular' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 5). As Whelehan outlines, within backlash narratives feminism is often perceived to be dogmatic, restricting the rights to 'free speech' and serving as a bastion of political correctness (2000: 24). Even in the academy, along with the disappearance of women's studies at undergraduate level from British universities, McRobbie (2008) has observed a denigration of feminism and assumptions conflating the women's movement with misandry, despite a seeming continued interest from students about feminism and its past.

As Imogen Tyler argues, the mediation of feminism in the 1970s through pervasive and damaging images of generic 'feminist types' within popular culture has had a divisive and long-lasting effect, particularly in terms of distorting the history of the women's movement and the meaning of identity politics (2007: 173). The caricature of the 'selfish feminist' is but one of these types that encapsulate ideas of the women's movement as narcissistic, anti-family, and apolitical – notably views shared by those from the political

[1] A front page run by British tabloid newspaper the *Daily Mail* is evidence of this still-prevailing 'retro-sexist' language, which featured a photograph of UK Prime Minister, Theresa May and Scotland's First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, in March 2017. The headline read: 'Never mind Brexit, who won Legs-it!' The headline caused controversy for its sexist connotations, particularly on social media (see O'Connor 2017), with Sturgeon herself responding during the Women in the World Summit in New York on 6 April, 2017: "no matter how much progress women have made and are making, it's a vivid illustration of how much more we still have to achieve […] This tendency to reduce women to body parts […] is not innocent […] and it's not something we should just laugh off" (in Gray 2017).
As Laura Bates, founder of The Everyday Sexism Project notes (https://everydaysexism.com), sexism can be perceived of as 'an invisible problem' as it 'does seem to occupy a uniquely acceptable position when it comes to public discourse, with a general willingness to laugh and ignore it rather than define it as the prejudice it is' (2014: 23, 29).

left as well as the conservative right (Tyler 2007: 174). Popular media continues to manifest negative representations of feminism with a focus on how radical potential via collective action is lacking in contemporary society. Tracing 40 years of print media representations of feminism between 1968 and 2008, Kaitlynn Mendes identifies an accumulative erasure of political, collective discussions about feminist activism in British and American press over time, with feminist discourses arguably becoming deradicalised and increasingly constructed by neoliberal inflections (2012: 564-66) – a problematic public construction for a political project.

A generational conflict between 'new' and 'old' feminisms seemingly underpins these mediated discourses; a widespread dismissal or 'post-ing' of the second wave, predicated on the consideration of the movement as 'angry, shrill or radical', is routinely pitted against aspirations for a 'modern' and 'fun' feminism that does not take gender politics too seriously (Mendes 2012: 561-62, Douglas 2010). Further, contemporary feminist discourse is injected with neoliberal values, which again, pertain to the 'can-do' attitude of the individual; focused on the demonstration of femininity, consumption, and sexual power, rather than on collective action addressing systematic inequalities (Mendes 2012: 562).

Such a sentiment is also acknowledged and lamented within the academy: 'Often it seems feminism has become a kind of private passion, a way of working through the intractable issues of the day in regard to sexuality, and the requirement to fulfil so many normative expectations' (McRobbie 2008). Underpinning much of the scholarship about postfeminism is the incentive to trace and unpick the effects of these generational shifts in relation to their manifestations in the academy and in popular culture. The messiness often ascribed to the concept is an articulation of the difficulty in situating feminist ideas within these complex and contradictory sites. Further, notions of different generations of feminism invariably encompass varying concerns, as feminist discourse has become increasingly entwined in – and defined by – popular media. So, what we are dealing with in this context is the relationship between postfeminism and third wave feminism (Tasker and Negra 2007: 18).

As many scholars have identified, third wave feminism is understood to have emerged in popular consciousness alongside, and in contention with, already widespread and well-articulated postfeminist sentiments in the mid-1980s (Orr 1997, Siegel 1997a, Gillis and Munford 2004), and is often complexly negotiated in the space between second wave and postfeminist thought (Kinser 2004: 135). Like any other feminism, the third wave is defined by a working through of contradictions (Kinser 2004: 31); grounded as it is by women of colour from the second wave, including bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Hazel Carby, and Toni Morrison, whose work contains 'languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways, and that give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition' (Heywood and Drake 1997: 9). Particularly in academia, third wave feminism's politics of difference are largely understood to incorporate concerns from women of colour, women from the global south, and women who are lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (Riordan 2001: 280) whose voices have historically been marginalised in both political and cultural spaces. Indeed, part of the third wave agenda is rightly about owning hegemonic privileges and acknowledging that 'white women's paths to a coalition-based feminist consciousness have often been based in ignorance, contradiction, and confusion' (Heywood and Drake 1997: 12).

Postfeminism, however, does not have the same parameters as the political movement of feminism or share the same affiliations with second wave theory and activism that define the wave metaphor (Genz 2006: 341, Kinser 2004). Rather, '[i]t's origins are much more impure, emerging in and from a number of contexts (academia, media and consumer culture) that have been influenced by feminist concerns and women's social enfranchisement' (Genz 2006: 341). The tensions between third wave and postfeminist thought exemplify the complex entanglement between the multiplicities of these generational feminist positions. As Shelley Budgeon's (2011) work unpacks, third wave feminism aims to reconstitute the subject of feminism for new generations, often in ambiguous ways that present challenges to established definitions of feminist values and practices, experienced as a result of the precariousness of contemporary gender relations and social conditions in late modernity. These tensions are brought to the surface via new

femininities defined by an individualist politics, encouraging celebration of 'self-definition, self-responsibility and *independence* from a collective identification with gender or feminism' which can easily become conflated with a postfeminist rhetoric of empowerment (Budgeon 2011: 288 [original emphasis]). This is not to say that third wave does not mobilise collectively: as Kristine Aune and Rose Holyoak evidence, third wave, particularly in the UK, can be understood as 'a flurry of activity and a rising tide of contention – driven forward by a cohort of mostly younger feminists for whom women's liberation is an unfinished project' (2017: 4).

This is also not to say that identity politics cannot be collective. A sense of identity *has* worked to bring marginalised groups (such as people of colour and those who identify as LGBTQ) together in community and progress, and awareness of intersectional difference is absolutely necessary when thinking about systems of oppression (Crenshaw 1991). However, it is an uncritical project of selfhood that 'reduces politics to the right to self-expression, regardless of form or substance' which ultimately present conceptual inconsistencies with feminism (Budgeon 2011: 289). As Budgeon notes:

> While focusing on the opportunities that contradictions might bring to analysis of new femininities the third-wave project must also engage with the limits set by these contradictions and offer a more critical analysis of how and why they are sustained. Individual empowerment is an important element in transforming current social arrangements but while necessary is not sufficient. (Budgeon 2011: 289-90)

Figures of 'feminist dissent' prominent in the 1980s, namely Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, and Rene Denfeld, are exemplary of this move towards an individualised self-project (Orr 1997, Siegel 1997a, Gillis and Munford 2004, Kinser 2004). These popular figures sought to "reclaim" feminism for a new generation of women who have come of age with a 'sense of entitlement', and for whom gender inequality is looked upon with scepticism (Budgeon 2011: 282). Echoing postfeminist sentiments, these writers are often problematically categorised with the third wave, illustrating postfeminism's prolific and sophisticated ideology in co-opting and potentially depoliticising the central tenets of feminism (Kinser 2004: 124-31). While these 'feminist dissenters' brought intergenerational conversation to the fore in popular discourse, this was seen to be at the expense both of an accurate account of feminist history and of a dialogue that aimed to incite further action. As

Deborah L. Siegel notes: 'In their incorporation of a rhetoric of repossession, in their masterful articulation of "good" feminism, and their righteous condemnation of monolithic "bad" feminism, Wolf, Roiphe, and Denfeld make feminist history the story of a product rather than that of a process' (1997b: 59).

A prolific girl culture informed by the gendered, raced, and classed sensibilities of postfeminism emerged from this ambiguous space between the second and third wave. Beginning in the early 1990s following a shift in feminist consciousness, where third wave thinking was emerging as a response to the struggle of accommodating difference in an increasingly pluralistic world (Kinser 2004: 140-42), the word 'girl' took on a reclaimed and recuperated worth in Western culture: 'no longer a simply derogatory and disrespectful term but one that captures the contradictions shaping female identity for young women whose world had been informed by the struggles and gains of second wave feminism' (Gillis and Munford 2004: 169). A rising mass culture repeatedly and obsessively embraced girls throughout the twentieth century as products of cultural change (Driscoll 2002: 11). Popular figures such as The Spice Girls, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Barbie, and those featured in magazines like Cover Girl, or as part of Nike's 'Play Like a Girl' advertising campaign, were associated with the notion of 'girl power', which attached value and encouraged celebration of the achievements, culture, and aspirations of girls.

Such ideas of female power, however, are seemingly harnessed by postfeminist articulations of youthful femininity, mainstream feminism, and empowerment through consumption (Whelehan 2000, Riordan 2001, Hopkins 2002, Harris 2004, Walter 2010). As Sarah Projansky argues, it is postfeminism that produced the very conditions for the emergence of girl discourse – a discourse that, in turn, both *contributes to and sustains postfeminism* (2007: 44 [original emphasis]). Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra note the '"girling" of femininity' by popular postfeminist figurations such as *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) and Britney Spears, who are termed and treated as 'girls' throughout womanhood (2007: 18). Regardless of her age, the postfeminist woman is 'quintessentially adolescent' and is in constant pursuit of, although never quite reaching, adulthood; thus, such a constant state of becoming allows postfeminism to remain 'fresh' in the context of commodity

culture (Projansky 2007: 45). As Projansky argues elsewhere: 'the current girl inherits the desire to "have it all," while embracing (unlike her mother, with no angst) both girl power independence and persistent commodity consumption that puts her sexualized body and her self on display' (2014: 12). Again, such promises privilege a certain type of white, middle-class girlhood/ womanhood and expression of femininity.

Attempting to offer an angry and rebellious subversion of such pejorative infantilised and sexualised connotations associated with girlhood, the subcultural Riot Grrrl movement emerged in America during the early 1990s (Siegel 2007: 146). With roots in political action and feminist consciousness, this network of female punk bands and their followers seek to control their own cultural production by making their own music, zines, and Internet sites, putting forth radical messages about gendered concerns such as rape, domestic violence, sexism, homophobia, reproductive rights, body image, and sexuality (Garrison 2000: 142-43, Riordan 2001: 287). Such cultural labour seeks to challenge patriarchal and capitalist structures, albeit work that is still organised by the latter constraints, but with a motive for political action rather than mere profit (Riordan 2001: 289). While Riot Grrrl seemingly eludes commodification, its ethos of feminist agency influenced by third wave thinking is often problematically conflated with popularised pro-girl rhetoric, which seemingly co-opts ideas of female empowerment in order to sell cultural products, thereby neutralising radical potential in favour of passive consumption (Riordan 2001: 289-96).[2] Putting it simply, like Ellen Riordan, it could be said that 'commodified pro-girl rhetoric has taken the feminist out of feminism' (2001: 280).

Popular Girls, Popular Feminism

The contemporary texts that inform this thesis are marked by the ways in which they highlight distinct tensions between feminism and postfeminism, feminism and girlhood, feminism and neoliberalism, such as these outlined above. As popular cultural products,

[2] In much the same ways subsequent to the emergence of second wave feminism in the 1960s, mainstream media attacked and trivialised the political substance of the Riot Grrrl movement, framing it as self-indulgent, man-hating, and not relevant to the broader female experience (Douglas 2010: 45).

they are part of a contemporary mediascape wherein 'media incessantly look at and invite us to look at girls', spectacularising and objectifying their appearances, 'everywhere' (Projansky 2014: 5). As Susan J. Douglas suggests, this 'overrepresentation' of women in the mainstream media and popular culture has offered mere 'fantasies of power'; which position women 'as having made it' in professional, sexual, financial, and personal capacities, but are far removed from the realities of how the vast majority of girls and women live their lives (2010: 4-5). The targeting of girls as an important 'powerful' consumer demographic (Douglas 2010, Projansky 2014, Banet-Weiser 2015b), for example, can be recognised in the English-language rebranding of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (Newman 2011, Gates 2013) (Chapter 1); in the commodification of Katniss's symbolic 'Girl on Fire' identity for a smartphone game and other merchandise by Lionsgate (Chapter 2); and in Dunham's appropriation of the term 'girl' as part of her transmedia performance (Woods 2015, Murray 2017) (Chapter 3). A central focus of my analyses is how these girls, both in their textual and extratextual incarnations, occupy powerful subjectivities that are, to varying degrees, curtailed by the fetters of branding and consumerism. An objective equally as important to this research project, however, is to foreground moments when these performances of girlhood exceed the fetters associated with their brand.

The increased malleability that has been recognised in the commodification of concepts such as girlhood and 'girl power' can also be recognised in recent formulations of feminism (Banet-Weiser 2015b: 183). As I have outlined so far, contestations of such popular inflections of feminism have been recurrent in scholarly criticism since the 1980s. In the current decade especially, however, scholars as well as popular cultural commentators increasingly draw their attention to the 'new luminosity' of feminism in popular culture (Gill 2016a: 1). Indeed, feminism has become, and remains, a 'ubiquitous word' in popular culture (Valenti 2014), but arguably in a way that has not been recognised before. Filling glossy magazines (Keller and Ringrose 2015), it is seen as an important identity to claim (or not) by male and female celebrities alike (Duberman 2014). Feminism is the subject of many best-selling books or "manifestos", such as *Lean In:*

Women, Work, and the Will to Lead (2013) by CEO of Facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, and *#GIRLBOSS* (2014) by Sophia Amoruso, founder and CEO of the now defunct Nasty Gal.[3] Feminist slogans are printed on t-shirts and lingerie (Genz 2006: 345-46, Zeisler 2017), and contemporary art installations, like the statue of the 'Fearless Girl' on Wall Street for example, are attracting mass media and public attention for their "feminist" symbolisms (Sheffler 2017).[4] As Andi Zeisler, cofounder of Bitch Media, puts it: 'feminism got *cool*' (2016: x [original emphasis]).

Like girl power and its various postfeminist inflections, the popular bracketing of these cultural products as 'feminist' has been contested as a result of their inherent ties with corporate brands. Catherine Rottenberg (2014) uses the term 'neoliberal feminism' to describe this new form of feminism that she argues is coalescing in the USA. Rottenberg sees high-powered women like Sandberg to be the new subject of a contemporary mode of feminist awareness, but one that is profoundly informed by a neoliberal market rationality: 'This subject willingly and forcibly acknowledges continued gender inequality but […] her feminism is so individuated that it has been completely unmoored from any notion of *social* inequality and consequently cannot offer any sustained analytic of the structures of male dominance, power, or privilege (2014: 424-25 [original emphasis]). Encouraging women to 'lean in' to their individual careers, Sandberg's work calls into being 'a subject who is compelled and encouraged to conform to the norms of the market while assuming responsibility for her own well-being' (Rottenberg 2014: 426).

Within such a revolution, Rottenberg argues, '[t]here is no orientation beyond the self' that may 'attempt to confront the tension between liberal individualism, equality, and

[3] Growing an eBay site for vintage clothing in 2006 to a multi-million-dollar e-commerce website by 2014, Amoruso's Nasty Gal declared bankruptcy the day after the US presidential election in 2016. Accompanying this decline were reports of Amoruso's discriminatory dismissal of employees, including pregnant women (see Testa 2017). She has since set up a digital media company by the name of Girlboss Media (www.girlboss.com), which consists of a podcast, blog, foundation, and rallying events dedicated to encouraging female entrepreneurship, self-growth, and building a community of women. Amoruso's #GIRLBOSS has also been adapted into television series *Girlboss* (2016-), for streaming service Netflix.

[4] Created by Kristen Visbal, the bronze sculpture depicts a young girl defiantly standing before the well-known 'Charging Bull' statue on Wall Street, New York. Commissioned by investment firm State Street Global Advisors, it was unveiled the day before International Women's Day in 2017 as part of their campaign to encourage companies to increase the numbers of their women board members (see Levy 2017).

those social pressures that potentially obstruct the realization of 'true' equality'' – thus is antithetical to the very purpose of feminism itself (2014: 426-28). Similarly, Zeisler's formulation of this context is 'marketplace feminism', which she argues is feminism's most complex role to date in American, if not global, culture: '[M]ediated, decoupled from politics, staunchly focused on individual experience and actualization – [marketplace feminism] dovetails with instilled beliefs about power, about activism, about who feminists are and what they do' (2016: xiv-xvi).

Feminist identities within this context are often defined by 'unencumbered choice' (Keller and Ringrose 2015: 132), and 'operate in an attention economy that is deeply shaped by patterns of exclusion and domination' (Gill 2016a: 2). As Zeisler notes: 'Defining "feminist" as "a woman who lives the life she chooses" is great if you're a woman who already has choices. But it does nothing for the vast majority on the outside […] waiting in vain for that empowerment to trickle down' (2016: 219). Although attempting to offer a corrective to the perceived limitations of second wave feminism, third wave feminists advocate women's right to choose and express themselves in line with their lived experience, but as Budgeon argues, the substance of these choices must be interrogated critically in order to motivate systematic change (2011: 288).

Further, those who give feminism a voice in popular culture are often those who are already privileged with a platform. As Roxane Gay contends, celebrity figures may co-opt a feminist identity but the work of feminism should not be forgotten in favour of these celebratory 'moments' of acclaim (2014c). Likewise, bell hooks (1984, 2000) argues for 'advocacy' over 'identity' in feminism so as to encourage greater exploration beyond the classed and raced hierarchies that undermine and work to restrict feminist concerns to gender equality within existing patriarchal structures. Writing more recently, hooks champions the crucial insight – especially by women of colour – which has led to better understandings of female identity shaped by intersectional feminist thought (2013). Such a crucial insight by women of colour, however, is increasingly superseded by a popularised 'faux feminism', an entrepreneurial ideology that remains complicit with white capitalist patriarchy (hooks 2013). As Anthea Taylor argues, 'certain narratives about feminism – as

well as certain ways of being feminist – come to be privileged (while others elided)' through celebrity figures (2014: 76-7).

The celebrity visibility of the girls in this study, particularly Lawrence and Dunham, are important public figures through which to think through the complications of this moment for feminism. For Dunham more exclusively than Lawrence, feminism is central to the 'performative practice' of her celebrity and her position in the public eye (Marwick and boyd 2011). Faced with charges of faux feminism in both academic and more popular spheres, Dunham's creative and social engagements through her branded identity has been seen by some to perpetuate facets of 'white feminism' (Ayres-Deets 2013) and the problematic equation of feminism with that of a competitive individualising project consistent with neoliberal times (McRobbie 2015), as discussed above. As Hannah Hamad and Taylor have suggested, addressing the myriad ways in which celebrity and feminism intersect is both politically and critically imperative, especially since 2014, wherein media culture lit up with 'touchstone moments' in response to a celebrity feminist zeitgeist (2015: 124-26) that is arguably still burgeoning.

Within this context, then, consisting of a 'very tricky blend of post-feminism, neoliberalism, and capitalism, [which are] all reinforcing each other' (Negra in Gill et al. 2016: 728-29), what feminism is and is not is becoming increasingly convoluted and difficult to define. To put it simply: 'When everyone is a feminist, is anyone?' (Valenti 2014). As third wave feminist thinkers have propagated, there is a need now more than ever to remain vigilant about how we draw this line, particularly at a time when global pluralism continues to complicate such a project; as Amber E. Kinser neatly delineates: 'Feminist living lacks precision. This is at once its greatest strength and its greatest challenge' (2004: 148). Notably, what feminism is not is often still measured against and is relative to past generations. Such debates, whether staged in the media or in the academy, contain tensions between feminists from older generations who seemingly express disappointment about how younger generations engage with feminist issues, while younger feminists, in turn, question the relevance of the terms and prescriptions set by their 'foremothers' (Budgeon 2001: 13). The entrenchment of these opposing positions

has seemingly resulted in a 'stalemate', or an 'impasse' between feminist epistemologies, wherein the concept of postfeminism has often signalled feminism's loss of currency (Budgeon 2001: 13).

Of course, it is important to note that previous waves of feminism cannot be thought of as any more, or any less, coherent than those which are thought to define the current moment. Clare Hemmings (2005, 2011) argues that such generational debates, reproduced by certain academic practices, have led to an oversimplification of feminism, its complex history, and its multiple subjectivities. Mapping narratives about the recent feminist past in academic journals, Hemmings interrogates how certain dominant stories are secured through publishing and teaching practices which elide feminism's actual past through 'a process of imagined linear displacement' (2005: 131). These dominant narratives typically tell a story of the 1970s as essentialist, the 1980s as a phase of identity politics, before a shift towards difference and an evacuation of politics in the 1990s and beyond (Hemmings 2005: 117). As Hemmings argues, such generalisations detach feminism from its own past while 'insisting that we bear the burden of these fantasized failings' (2005: 130). Discourses of feminism and postfeminism are arguably underpinned by similar teleological markers denoting successes or failures.

As Hemmings argues elsewhere, popular market-driven feminism and postfeminism are often defined by an 'emptiness' and a lack of substance – both seen as 'parodies of a social movement that has incontrovertibly passed' (2011: 4). Analysis of feminism in the present is reliant on this "death" so that a familiar object may be lamented, and, in order to occupy this particular present, the future must always be deferred (Hemmings 2011: 73). Occupying this static space and negotiating these anxieties is 'a subject of a past-to-come', enabling a temporal gaze, which moves backwards and forwards, anticipating a return of feminism that is always yet to come (Hemmings 2011: 73-4). Strands of recent scholarship, which I return to in the next section, have called into question postfeminism's capacity as an analytical concept on the basis that it fails to move beyond this impasse.

This narrative of 'loss', acknowledging and lamenting the demise of a feminist political agenda from previous generations, is a familiar and recurring theme within

Western feminist theory, made ever more prevalent by the implications of feminism in the circuits of celebrity (Taylor 2014, Hamad and Taylor 2015). Indeed, what is considered as feminist debate in Western countries continues to be staged principally in the media rather than outside it (Gill 2007a: 268), which is exemplified in no uncertain terms by the 'in-fighting' between different generations of celebrity feminist voices. As Anita Brady notes in relation to the 2013 'online feud' between singer-songwriters Miley Cyrus and Sinéad O'Connor, such generational debates rely on the notion of an inauthentic celebrity feminism that is at odds with the aims and strategies of feminist politics; a tension that partly rests upon differing ideas of female sexual freedom (2016: 430). [5] But as Brady forthrightly argues, the feminist meanings that are read from a particular image are relative to the intertextual references to media histories and celebrity systems that the image may deliberately invite, making the work of celebrity feminism and its politics impossible to define neatly (2016: 439).

As I argue in Chapter 3, Dunham's polarising identity illuminates the fine line between the "rights" and "wrongs" of feminism; between celebrity as a powerful political site for feminism or merely a 'selling out' of a social, political movement. On the one hand, as Jennifer Wicke recognises, '[f]eminism is not exempt from celebrity material' (1994: 754), but at the same time, feminism should not simply be reduced to the form of sexual and gender politics that tend to reaffirm the wider signifying systems of certain celebrities and their brand (Brady 2016: 434). These points of reference used to distinguish between what is and is not feminism only seem to present more problems for scholars and commentators and are arguably to be rendered pointless in a media landscape where 'the yoking of celebrity and feminism continues to evolve' in increasingly complex and myriad ways (Hamad and Taylor 2015: 126). It is the complexities and ambiguities of this on-

[5] For the video accompanying Cyrus' single 'Wrecking Ball', the singer reportedly took inspiration from O'Connor's tearful performance for the video for her 1990 single, 'Nothing Compares 2 U'. As in O'Connor's video, Cyrus looks directly at the camera while singing, shaved hair, and tears running down her cheeks. In the media feud that followed, O'Connor criticised the younger singer for her overtly sexualised image in the video (Cyrus swings naked astride a large wrecking ball and licks a sledgehammer provocatively), which O'Connor argues is exploitative rather than empowering. A series of exchanges between the two celebrities continued for some time online (see Brady 2016).

going relationship – as well as the turbulent terrain between feminism and postfeminism – which this thesis opens out and throws new light on.

Feminism in the Current Moment: Beyond Postfeminism?

The mediated texts that provide points of analysis for this project are contemporary works produced in the current decade. The popularity and renown that these texts have garnered – although in many ways unique to their individual stories and the gendered identities at the centre of them – all coalesce and are representative of a broader cultural moment defined by a kind of uncertainty or anxiety about the future of feminism. Moreover, as I argue in the following chapters, in their mediation of feminism, or of feminist ideas, the work inherent in these texts can be distinguished for the ways in which they motion towards a more ambiguous space beyond existing theoretical frameworks of authenticity, gender, subjectivity, and feminism. Since the beginning of the decade, scholars have mined the limitations and the difficulties of conceptualising this space. In this section I want to briefly map out some of these key interventions that inform my analyses, before moving on to a more in-depth summation of the kernel arguments and key concepts in this thesis.

Similar to Hemmings' reference to a subject-position that anticipates a feminism that is yet to come (2011: 73-4), Catharine Lumby recognises a 'sticking point' underpinning both academic and public debates about feminism and media (2011: 96). As she asserts: 'Feminism has always been about working with double-jointed positions', making it difficult to move beyond oppositional frames of reference such as second wave and postfeminism, activist and popular feminism, feminist theory and praxis (Lumby 2010: 96-9). Whelehan (now-)famously describes representations of postfeminism as 'boring and frustrating to analyse because its message requires little unpacking'; a tired dynamic that has 'turned in on itself' through repetitive applications of choice rhetoric, self-fashioning, perpetual youth, and carefree humour' (2010: 159). Citing the filmic adaptation of *Sex and the City* (2008) as exemplary of this, Whelehan argues that postfeminism merely 'ventriloquizes' feminism, where 'the effect isn't to raise the consciousness of the audience as much as to

gain their complicity in this "knowledge" […] for which there is no solution' (2010: 162). Scholars more recently have also rightly called for more intersectional (Butler 2013) and transnational (Dosekun 2015) approaches that go beyond the limiting idealised white, middle-class, heterosexual, Westernised subject, so often privileged in postfeminist scholarship.

Conceptualised as a sensibility (Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b) that has largely been characterised by its media representations (Rowe Karlyn 2011, Gill et al. 2016), the perceived discord between postfeminism and second wave feminism has often been depicted through conventional tropes such as the troubled mother-daughter relationship. As Kathleen Rowe Karlyn's (2011) work examines, millennial popular culture was mapped by films such as *Titanic* (1997) and *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), which embody intergenerational conflicts and contradictions between young women who came of age in the 1990s and 2000s. Having benefitted from the gains achieved by feminism's second wave, for middle-class young women today, feminism is seen largely as a 'structuring absence'; dated and irrelevant (Rowe Karlyn 2011: 8). *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002) has also become emblematic of postfeminism's apparent separation from second wave feminism. The now proverbial cover of *Time* magazine published in 1998 – featuring the heads of Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem in black and white, followed by Ally McBeal's in colour, underlined by the question 'Is feminism dead?' – is often cited for its blatant oversimplified construction of these intergenerational tensions.

As Kristyn Gorton notes in reference to Ally's signification here, Calista Flockhart does not share the same political agency as the other women on the cover, for hers is exchanged for that of her character's: 'She is relegated to the fictionalised version of herself, and deprived of a voice of her own' (2007: 215-16). The 'metonymic shift' between then and now that is presented here, not only exemplifies an 'artificial divide' between second wave and postfeminism – interfering with the politics of feminism by reducing its complexities to a simplistic, marketable narrative trajectory from substance to style – but, more crucially, suggests a breakdown between the personal and the political (Gorton 2007: 213-16). As Ealasaid Munro notes, the implications of this well-known feminist

adage, while coined to highlight the impact of sexism and patriarchy on the private lives of women, are often fraught with issues of classism, racism, and essentialism levelled at the second wave movement for its perceived neglect of the many differences that effect and challenge an assumed category of 'woman' – weaknesses that third wave feminism seeks to address (2013).

For Gorton, however, it is the pleasures and enjoyment contained in postfeminist texts like *Ally McBeal* that carry *political* resonance: the series arguably presents the personal and the political as inextricably linked in ways that negotiate the legacy of the second wave in today's culture through its playful ambiguity about what feminism is (2007: 213-14 [emphasis added]). Indeed, Ally's sometimes messy, melodramatic negotiations of conflicting desires for both financial independence via a successful career and heterosexual companionship in her personal life, invites possible authentic points of identification and escape for female viewers (Gorton 2007: 219-20). In a cogent summation of her thesis, Gorton argues:

> Some women enjoy Ally's fantasies, in part, because the demands of second wave feminism have *not* yet been met: women one-sidedly look to the personal because they are still disproportionately excluded from public power and influence. If apathy is the political response to this form of social exclusion, perhaps the atomised consumption of fantasy is its social consequence. (Gorton 2007: 221)

Rather than academic readings that only use texts like *Ally McBeal* to demonstrate the apparent triumph of postfeminism, then, Gorton contends that the enjoyment derived from these personal representations of femininity rather intensifies and re-engages debates about the *need* for feminism and the continued salience of second wave demands on modern women (2007: 219-22 [original emphasis]). Gorton's (2007) work here provides an important intervention to work on postfeminist texts, particularly as it carves out room for other interpretations besides those concerned solely with the ideological limitations of postfeminism.

In a similar vein, Debra Ferreday proposes that the celebration of femininity in such postfeminist texts could be interpreted as something other than an aversion to feminism: 'as longing for something different, for a world in which the aesthetics and practices shared by feminine subjects might be celebrated' (2015a). The need to engage with the

ambiguities in media texts is arguably propelled by online engagements: the 'free labor' practiced by fans of popular texts, for example, can be seen to offer subversive readings which are rendered through and underpinned by the emotional, intellectual, psychological, or artistic connections fans have to the source (De Kosnik 2013). In part, one of the intentions of my own research is to draw out the 'deeply held emotions and passionately embraced pleasures' (Jenkins 2013: 283) associated with my primary texts; specifically, to investigate how engagements by fans help to further isolate aspects of performance that potentially rupture hegemonic narratives.

As is evident from these recent interventions in scholarship, then, 'the new cultural life of feminism' (Gill 2016a) may require a difference in approach to grapple with the changes of this renewed cultural terrain. The notion of a 'fourth wave' of feminism noted by some has rendered readings of postfeminism as 'potentially redundant' in light of a 'surge of feminist engagement' (Retallack et al. 2016: 88). Defined, in part, by its focus on technology (see, for example, Cochrane 2013, Knappe and Lang 2014: 364), and its Internet presence (Valenti in Solomon 2009), scholars are directing increased attention towards how platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are utilised by feminists for their intersectional and transnational potential, and their ability to disseminate ideas and shape new modes of discourse via methods such as 'hashtag feminism' (Baer 2016: 18).

Some scholars have argued such 'diverse networks' and 'community-building' can be distinguished from older forms of feminist political activism (Keller 2012: 433), particularly in terms of how such activity is engaging teenage girls, who utilise social media and blogging sites in order to participate in, and arguably reframe, feminist discourse and activism (Keller 2012, Keller 2015, Keller and Ringrose 2015, Rettalack et al. 2016). While such engagement offers promise and can be interpreted positively as a renewed interest by younger generations in taking up the feminist mantle, a number of scholars have expressed caution with regard to the Internet as a democratised space. Analyses of online activism must be nuanced, as feminism does not stand uncontested or immune to challenge despite its increased visibility (Taylor 2016: 284); particularly as

media platforms also open up space for other 'zeitgeists' to flourish, such as popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2015a), in as much as they offer a means to contend with (Meyer 2014), 'talk back' (Horeck 2014: 1106), and 'call out' (Munro 2013) against them.

With so many multifaceted feminist positions – which are sometimes fractured and opposing – there comes the challenge of reconciling the messy politics of these positions with collective action that is able to bring about wider necessary change. As Gill argues, with simple progress and backlash narratives no longer able to represent this complex moment for feminism (albeit such limiting binaries and essentialist framing arguably never could), there is a need to '*think together*' the varied meanings and affects of feminism, in a way that accounts for the myriad political and ideological differences that separate them (2016b: 612-25). Furthermore, as Gill notes elsewhere in relation to the study of subjectivity and identity in media representations, 'we still haven't got enough of a vocabulary in place to really understand how culture gets inside us and actually shapes so many things about us' (in Gill et al. 2016: 735). Indeed, there may also be cause to suggest that this current moment is also defined by a change in the kinds of representations that are emerging in popular culture.

To return to Ferreday's recent observations, she perceives of a new sensibility within media culture that is 'grittier and more ambivalent' than postfeminism's 'shiny-happy aesthetic' (2015a). This is exemplified particularly in accumulative representations of sexual violence which grapple with issues of consent, power, and objectification in ways that seem to 'command' a feminist response: 'If postfeminism was a reaction against a perceived denial of pleasure and erasure of the feminine subject's agency, the current sensibility of feminist ambivalence can be seen as a reaction against postfeminism's own absences and silences' (Ferreday 2015a).

As Negra notes, in a culture that is profoundly affected by broader economic and social shifts following the recession in 2008, postfeminism functions as a kind of alibi for the damages that are changing social norms and the current economic order (in Gill et al.

2016: 728).[6] And perhaps there is something 'hopeful' to be found in the seeming renewed intensity of current feminist critique, whether considered as part of a fourth wave, or of a different temporality entirely – the same suspension of disbelief that was required of postfeminism's proposed world free of poverty, racism, and violence, no longer seems possible (Ferreday 2015a). It could also be argued that criticism more attuned to social issues regarding gender, class, and race, is reshaping how popular representations are judged. Indeed, as Jaime Weinman (2017) argues, emphasis on the politics behind art fuels intense conversation, with online outlets giving platforms to a diverse range of voices and responses that are disseminated globally; compelling critics, audiences, and creators to engage in, and take note of, these kinds of conversations. From the discussions of the affinities between my chosen texts and these changing cultural and theoretical parameters of postfeminism, it is the performances of the girlhoods within them that illuminate what is at stake in this messy terrain.

The Labour of Feminist Performance: Messy Articulations of Postfeminism and Girlhood On-Screen

Having discussed what the messiness of postfeminism is, I now want to consider what it *does.* Before moving on to outline each chapter more specifically, I want to unpack how the messiness of the current moment articulates issues around postfeminism and girlhood. Both concepts are complexly intertwined and offer, in and of themselves, certain ambiguities and contradictions which bring with them various conundrums of contemporary culture.

As the narratives in each of the texts that I consider in this thesis illustrate, girlhood is often about navigating the unstable terrain on the precipice of womanhood in a modern world. Girls in their twenties – Lisbeth Salander, Katniss Everdeen, Hannah Horvath (and her friends) – occupy an in-between space typically represented in 'coming of age' narratives. Such narratives often address a sense of being, through processes of making

[6] See Tasker and Negra's edited collection entitled *Gendering the Recession: Media and Culture in an Age of Austerity* (2014) for feminist analyses that address the contradictions between popular culture representations and lived austerity in the current moment.

sense of oneself as an individual, and as a member of society in the face of contradictory myths and symbols (Hentges 2006: 59). According to Catherine Driscoll's formulation of 'feminine adolescence' (part of her workings towards a genealogy of girlhood), this framework has less to do with a specific age category between 'teenage' and 'womanhood', but more to do with 'transition' and 'process' relative to dominant ideas of womanhood (2002: 6). In other words, the lack of definitive parameters for girlhood reflects the concept's slippery nature while at the same time foregrounding the pull of dominant narratives.

According to feminist scholarship of the past two decades, the figure of the girl within dominant narratives is often represented in connection with the increasing visibility of young women in contemporary life. Anita Harris's *Future Girl*, for example, explores how young women are positioned as 'a vanguard of new subjectivity', with their increased visibility in culture and professional industries exemplifying this new way of being in late modernity (2004: 1). In other words, 'young women and girlhood in contemporary Western societies are represented as the future' (Harris 2004: 3). Likewise, McRobbie's (2007) 'Top Girls' represent the 'hyper-activity' of girls across three key sites: consumer culture, sexuality, and work. As she argues, the meanings inherent in the figure of the girl in globally recognised films like *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001) also represent this emphasis on potential and progression in society, 'weighted towards capacity, success, attainment, enjoyment, entitlement, social mobility and participation' in public life (McRobbie 2007: 721).

As I outlined previously, these discourses of girlhood problematically reinforce postfeminism, reliant as they both are on the same representational metaphors of success and potential (Tasker and Negra 2007: 18). As contemporary girlhoods seek to mobilise, '[p]ostfeminist culture enacts fantasies of regeneration and transformation that also speak to a desire to change' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 22). Harris's 'can-do/ at-risk' dichotomy dominates popular media culture, whereby girls are seemingly constructed as either successful and empowered through their individuality, resilience, and self-drive, or fail to live up to these fantasies through lack of self-esteem and risky behaviours (2004: 16, 32).

As feminist scholars have shown, postfeminist culture addresses girls with the assumption that they are already 'gender aware', pushed by feminist influence and equal opportunity towards independence and self-reliance (Budgeon 2001, Harris 2004). McRobbie suggests that these processes of 'female individualisation' – self-monitoring and a responsibility for making personal plans and solutions – 'require that young women become important to themselves' (2007: 723). Despite enduring systemic and systematic gendered, raced, and classed inequalities, then, girls and young women are promised that they can "have it all" if they simply work hard and aim for success.

The term "having it all" is itself a reflection of the contradictions and ambiguities which inform postfeminist culture. As Amanda D. Lotz notes, the marked 'confusion and contradiction' of understandings of feminism in popular (US) culture at the turn of the 21st century seems to have encouraged 'an alternate language universe where words can simultaneously connote a meaning and its opposite' (2001: 105). Indeed, media culture of the time promised 'girl power', female success, and gender equality, alongside openly hostile scrutiny of women in the public eye, misogyny, and renouncements of feminism (Gill 2017a: 607). Similarly, the notion of "having it all" suggests an idealistic promise of perfection for women in both their personal and professional lives – namely in terms of balancing the demands of a successful career with the demands of sexual relationships and motherhood. On-screen, such a conundrum has been taken up by a number of texts – more explicitly in some than in others – which seemed to contribute to a postfeminist media 'canon' (Gill 2017a: 610); including titles already mentioned, such as *Sex and the City, Bridget Jones* and *Ally McBeal*.

Many feminist scholars have looked to these postfeminist texts as a means to further understand how popular culture 'functions as one of the sites on, through, and against which the meanings of feminism are produced and understood' (Moseley and Read 2002: 235). The work of Rachel Moseley and Jacinda Read, for instance, positions *Ally McBeal* as a television series which engages some of the contradictions which postfeminism presents – namely historical conflicts between feminism and femininity, between career and personal life, and the promise to "have it all" (2002: 232-38).

However, the distinctiveness of the series, they argue, is marked by the ways in which it contests such binaries, not through the representation of the conflict between them, 'but instead on the struggle to hold them together (Moseley and Read 2002: 232). As part of this 'postfeminist negotiation', *Ally McBeal* does not reject feminism but 'announces' its engagement with second wave debates via a female subject who admits to struggling with "having it all" – but without rejecting this as an impossible aim (Moseley and Read 2002: 240-46). Significantly, Ally makes no prescriptions for appropriate feminist identities – "I like being a mess – it's who I am" (Moseley and Read 2002: 247) – which suggests that the problems, frustrations, and contradictions facing young women in the 1990s are important despite revealing an inability to live upto ideals of life and love.

By this admission, then, the messiness of postfeminism is productive. Characters like Ally McBeal dramatise the confusion and difficulties of being a woman in contemporary life (albeit a certain type of woman: white, middle-class, professional, "liberated" (Moseley and Read 2002: 240)). The series illuminates the 'struggle' brought about by tensions between feminism and femininity, fantasy and reality, the public and the private (Moseley and Read 2002: 240); tensions which are a product of postfeminism itself. In so doing, such representations shed light on the 'process' of working these things out, on coming to terms with contemporary life and its problems. Moreover, as Moseley and Read's (2002) analysis alludes to, it is in the process of working things out which productively points towards something more positive in social and political terms – even if this looks, or is, unattainable in postfeminist times. As Gorton suggests, the ambiguities of Ally's character may represent the triumph of postfeminism in some ways but this, in fact, demonstrates the continuing salience of the demands of (second wave) feminism (2007: 221-22).

In many respects, the texts informing this thesis address similar difficulties with respect to being a woman in contemporary times. As I intend to unpack in each chapter, there is a messiness which defines the stories of the girlhoods that I analyse; whether this be in relation to gender, sexuality, race, class, embodiment, and/ or feminism. Like *Ally McBeal* who, according to the series' tagline is 'Single, successful, falling apart' – the girls

in this study are at odds with the ideals presented in postfeminist culture. Or as the tagline for Season 1 of *Girls* reads: they are 'Living the dream. One mistake at a time.' But unlike *Ally McBeal*, the girls and the lives that they lead are by no means presented as fantastical, or in some way holding on to a 'utopian resolution' (Moseley and Read 2002: 246). As I will show, television series like *Girls* go about undercutting the glamour of these ideals by exposing the emptiness of such promises. Furthermore, they express little or no desire to "have it all" but rather a *making do* with the partial and compromised progress that is offered by neoliberalism.

Upon consideration of the contradictions and ambiguities noted in these earlier representations from the postfeminist canon, then, it is evident that such conundrums no longer have the same cultural purchase on the lives of the girls and young women represented in more recent media culture. As Gill reflects, postfeminism 10 years on has 'tightened its hold in contemporary culture and has made itself virtually hegemonic' (2017a: 609). Indeed, it now appears as if postfeminism 'has become the new normal, a taken-for-granted common sense that operates as a kind of gendered neoliberalism' (Gill 2017a: 609). As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism enacts an 'economization' of political life, other spheres and activities, so that 'both persons and state are expected to comport themselves in ways that maximize their capital value in the present and enhance their future value […] through practices of entrepreneurialism, self-investment, and/or attracting investors' (2015: 17-22). This cultural landscape has also become fraught with war; large-scale movement of displaced people; a global financial crisis; austerity; and even those living in the liberal democracies of the Global North are affected by the 'waves of misogyny, racism, homophobia, xenophobia, Islamophobia and xenophobic nationalism that are evident in the vote for Brexit and its aftermath; the election of Donald Trump as the US President' (Gill 2017a: 608). Indeed, 'the growing strength of right-wing parties and movement across Europe mark a new moment in political life' (Gill 2017a: 608).

As already discussed, the last few years have also brought a growing visibility of feminism, but such visibility is uneven within a media culture where postfeminism and neoliberalism have become the pernicious norm (Gill 2017a: 611-12). Projansky argues

that the girl is a 'convenient figure' for 'working through' these contemporary social issues, but who embraces independence and commodity consumption, thereby putting her on display (2014: 11-12). What I am interested in here, are the types of labour attendant in the explicit (sometimes contradictory) feminist girlhoods, which navigate the new cultural and political moment discussed above.

Notions of labour as defined in bodies of work belonging to sociology and cultural studies are increasingly being applied by feminist scholars as a means to think through the complicated dynamic between postfeminism, neoliberalism, and subjectivity that I have mapped out. Notions of gendered labour can be traced back to established feminist Marxist traditions, such as those formulated by Silvia Federici, who argued that the role to which women have been confined to in capitalist society – whether physical, emotional, or sexual – must be recognised and *paid* for because of that which it is: work in the service of capital (1975: 3). The radical political perspective of considering 'wages for housework' by Federici is, as she notes, complicated by ambiguity and difficulty, for such labour is 'qualitatively different' in that it has been 'imposed on women' and is historically thought of as 'a natural attribute' of femaleness (1975: 2). As Federici goes on to argue: 'To demand wages for housework is to make it visible that our minds, bodies and emotions have all been distorted for a specific function, in a specific function, and then have been thrown back to us as a model to which we should all conform if we want to be accepted as women in this society' (1975: 5). As my analyses evidence, similar ambiguities still persist in terms of how women's work is hidden and made to seem invisible as part of the politics of postfeminism and neoliberalism.

This thesis examines different forms of labour which manifests itself and is brought to bear in various ways via the mediated girl figures from my chosen texts; most explicitly, for example, via labour of the body. Femininity is increasingly figured as a bodily property in postfeminist media culture (Gill 2007b: 149-50), with the bodies of girls and young women put under constant monitoring and surveillance via media, the public gaze, and men, which encourages maintenance and discipline of the body, self-surveillance in terms of adherence to fashion and beauty regimens, and a focus on these practices as 'freely

chosen' in the pursuit of 'being oneself (Gill 2007b: 149-53, McRobbie 2009, Gill and Schraff 2011). As Alison Winch notes, the female body remains central to the gaze of a hypersurveilled culture and is recognised as the object of a woman's labour: 'it is her asset, her product, her brand and her gateway to freedom and empowerment in a neoliberal market economy' (2015: 233). Significantly, as Susie Orbach suggests, Women are encouraged to translate this work on the body into categories of 'fun', 'being healthy', and 'looking after ourselves' (2017: vii, ix). The proliferation of the surveillance of women's bodies 'constitutes perhaps the largest type of media content across all genres and media forms' (Gill 2007a: 255), further ramping up the pressures associated with beauty norms in new and pernicious ways, 'facilitated by new technologies and by aggressive consumer capitalism that is colonising women's bodies' (Elias et al. 2017: 26). Thus, identifying and understanding various forms of embodied labouring under the terms of this postfeminist, neoliberal moment, are politically pressing avenues of enquiry for feminist scholarship (Elias et al. 2017: 9; see also Gill forthcoming). For the girls that I examine here, their bodies are central to their feminist performance – both textually and extra-textually – and the work that they do in public. More importantly, these performances are defined in terms of how they negotiate – and even resist – the pressures associated with femininity and hegemonic beauty norms.

My examination of labour also extends to the work of celebrity, as gendered discrepencies of scrutiny and denigration of bodies are amplified further in sites of fame and popularity where the lives of girls are made intensely public: 'readily available for discussion, evaluation, and consumption' (Projansky 2014: 7). This visibility requires much labour from celebrity figures in order to negotiate identity within a cultural moment characterised by postfeminism and neoliberalism. For celebrities especially, traces of labour towards the maintenance of the self, adhering to conventional standards of beauty, must remain invisible so as to appear part of a natural and authentic performance, or brand, of femininity (Weber 2009, Allen 2011). The problematic idealisation and privileging of certain subject positions of girlhood is also further emphasised by the intense and public gaze focused on female celebrities; so much so that Su Holmes and Negra argue

for what they see as as a 'new gendering of fame' (2011: 9). Celebrity typologies such as the 'train-wreck' exemplified by Britney Spears (Watkins Fisher 2011), and 'bad-girls', Paris Hilton and Lindsay Lohan, follow these same gendered characteristics and illustrate how 'female celebrities are positioned as lightning rods' for a range of social and cultural anxieties (Holmes and Negra 2008: 2-3). Celebrity culture, then, is an important lens through which to think about these subjectivities and in what ways young women are made (albeit problematically) visible. Each case study will address how the girls in question negotiate their visibility and ask in what ways they come to terms with being 'looked at' and 'seen'. As I will show, this visibility requires intense labour.

Through my analyses of Jennifer Lawrence and Lena Dunham especially, I am also interested in examining how labour has become 'intimate and personal' through methods of self-presentation in a capitalist society driven by the 'economic capacity to load products, including both objects and persons, with evocative meaning' (Sternberg 2006: 418). Visible as feminists in public, both Lawrence and Dunham, through aspects of their gendered performance and practice, offer complicated and sometimes ambiguous articulations of feminism; at a time when the personal is thought to threaten or distract from political intervention. Indeed, their affective labour draws attention to the struggles of being a woman and doing the work of feminism publically, in a cultural landscape where neoliberalism and postfeminism encourage a muddle of genuine feminist ideals with more superficial, commodified images of empowerment. It is the emotional and aesthetic dimensions of this work, I argue, that help to pinpoint how these mediated girlhoods perform ambivalence towards gendered hegemonic norms. In other words, I argue that it is the labour of feminist performance which helps to illuminate the contradictions, the struggles, and the problems which girls and young women are made to work through as they negotiate the messy reality of contemporary lived experience under postfeminism.

Outline of chapters

Through an examination of the representation of Lisbeth Salander in David Fincher's filmic adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011), Chapter 1 works as an effective

starting point for this study of gendered performance and the particular questions that this opens up about the commodification of feminism. The structure of the chapter essentially maps out key coordinates for this thesis, laying the groundwork for the particular themes that I cover: namely complexities of gender, embodiment, commodification, and empowerment. Broadly, my work interrogates the positioning of Lisbeth (Rooney Mara) as the 'selling-point' of the English-language franchise (Newman 2012) with respect to how this process of adaptation heavily foregrounds aesthetic style in its retelling of the original Swedish novel. Essentially a study of Lisbeth's performance of identity, then, this chapter functions as a kind of 'toolkit', which flags up certain tensions between the feminist intentions behind the literary characterisation and the commercial adaptation of this complex representation of girlhood.

Like the other two texts in this corpus, the narrative of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* brings to light certain anxieties associated with gendered experience in neoliberal times. Through the activities of journalist Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth, an expert computer hacker, we see the uncovering of corporate and gendered crimes, including a series of female murders by a killer operating in 'fringe spaces' (Gates 2013: 197). As Anna Westerståhl Stenport and Cecilia Ovesdotter Alm note about the story's literary origins, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* employs the crime fiction genre in order to reflect 'implicitly and explicitly – gaps between the rhetoric and practice in Swedish policy and public discourse about complex relations between welfare state retrenchment, neoliberal corporate and economic practices, and politicized gender construction' (2009: 158). As I discuss, the realities of this discrepancy are painfully rendered through Lisbeth's own experiences, with her becoming marked by and complexly wound up in such gendered crimes.

The chapter takes a logical progression through the main points of debate in relation to how Lisbeth's performance of identity – an identity that explores, and is in some ways representative of, sexism and misogyny – is adapted from the novel to the screen. As a starting point, I draw on Larsson's literary construction of Lisbeth, focusing on the ways in which her physical appearance works to determine how she moves through the margins

of society – a society that largely rejects her, subjecting her to extreme mistreatment and violence at the hands of men. I then move on to consider how Lisbeth's performance of both her identity and her gender in the Swedish- and English-language adaptations largely render her as distinct from stereotypical representations of women on-screen. Notably, however, Fincher's stylised attention to, and appropriation of, the aesthetics of Lisbeth's appearance resonate differently from the Swedish adaptations.

The remainder of the chapter consists of a detailed textual analysis of the costuming, hairstyling, and make-up so integral to Mara's incarnation of Lisbeth and how these elements are 'spectacularised' for the purposes of suspense and voyeurism often associated with Fincher's directorial style – and, of course, mainstream cinema more broadly (Mulvey 1975). Consideration of Lisbeth's appearance coded not as a 'punk fashion' choice but as 'someone saying, "Stay the fuck away from me"' in the scripting directions for *Dragon Tattoo* (Pierce 2011: 76), clearly flags up the moral and ethical implications associated with this adaptation. Furthermore, the commercialisation of Lisbeth's image – via real-life clothing lines, accessories, and other extra-textual promotional spreads for posters and magazines – problematically market this character as an 'American action hero' (Gates 2013: 195), seemingly diluting the intent and political substance of Larsson's novel. As I unpack in my analysis, Fincher's work seems to play provocatively with the audience's interest and curiosity in Lisbeth's subversive and unusual appearance but given the nature of her traumatic mistreatment at the hands of men, only further exacerbates the messy politics associated with the (male) adaptation of this characterisation. Thus, the analysis of the performative and creative work involved in this representation of girlhood underscores some of the key theoretical and conceptual debates surrounding (post)feminism and its mediations in popular culture that are grappled with and intervened in as part of this thesis.

The politics at stake in this project become increasingly marked with each chapter, with Chapter 2 focusing more explicitly on the inconsistencies between a self-reflexive cultural product and the socio-political critique embedded in its literary origins. Indeed, Collins's literary dystopian trilogy tells the story of reluctant hero Katniss Everdeen, whose

coming of age is defined by suffering and brutality at the hands of the ruthless Capitol government. As Mark Fisher writes: 'One of the services Suzanne Collins has performed is to reveal the poverty, narrowness, and decadence of the 'freedoms' we enjoy in late, late capitalism. The mode of capture [here] is hedonic conservatism' (2013). Forced to compete in televised gladiatorial tournaments that occur annually, reminding citizens of their lower status in society and the sins of their ancestors, these narratives follow Katniss's evolution from a naturally rebellious but reluctant hero, towards her figural and literal embodiment as the spearhead for the revolution that overthrows the Capitol. Katniss's subject position is exemplary of the disenfranchisement of a people by an oppressive political regime, and involves physical, psychical, and psychological trauma, revealing the crux of this story to be about the impact of an existence defined through and controlled by media (Collins in Hudson 2017). My analysis begins by flagging up the weighty ethical and moral implications involved in transforming this vehement critique of consumer capitalism into a cinematic global franchise, seemingly leaving no distance between the critical positioning of these texts and the capitalist, neoliberal systems that their narratives purport to condemn.

While the spectacle of *The Hunger Games* films complicates its message about the effects of mediatised culture, namely how news and entertainment harmfully blur the boundaries between fiction and reality, it also sheds light on the limits of existing conceptual frameworks when accounting for such phenomena. As my analysis identifies, the visual rendering of *The Hunger Games*' storyworld, specifically in its adoption of conventions of reality TV, popular news and entertainment forms, and 'celebrification', creates moments of ambiguity that have a powerful resonance. The affective quality of these texts have already attracted interest from scholars (Fisher 2013, Hassler-Forest 2016) but, as I argue, such interventions fail to fully explicate how feelings and emotions are key to understanding these stories and their inherent political charge. For Katniss, negotiating her identity and deciphering what is "real" in a media-saturated world is dependent on what and how she feels. As a media celebrity, she must learn to touch on the right feelings in order to make an affective connection with her audience. Rather than

being the root of her exploitation, though – part of the material and immaterial labour, class conflicts, and ruthless individualism enforced by the Capitol government – how Katniss instils an emotional reaction in the disenfranchised citizens of Panem results in a powerful revolution, thus reinforcing the political message of solidarity underpinning Collins's narratives.

The emotional and affective forms of labour that I identify in these texts go beyond these observations, however, to include how articulations between character and actor further emphasise the gendered work represented in *The Hunger Games*. The second half of Chapter 2, therefore, turns to Jennifer Lawrence's star persona and the ways in which the candid, self-reflexive aspects of her image add another layer to these texts. Drawing on the growing scholarship unpicking the emotional and affective practices of celebrity (Marshall 1997, Sternberg 2006, Redmond 2014, Redmond 2016a, Redmond 2016b), I argue that Lawrence's 'emotion work' (Nunn and Biressi 2010) actively draws attention to the gendered labour required of young women in postfeminist media culture; as opposed to concealing it as part of an authentic performance of postfeminist femininity (Weber 2009, Allen 2011, Orbach 2017).

Further, I question other scholars whose totalising understandings position Lawrence's image as wholly connotative of a postfeminist subjectivity (Petersen 2014, Kanai 2015). I utilise close analysis of Lawrence's physicality and 'face-work' (Goffman 1959), but rather than thinking of these elements as part of a 'composed and norm-driven construction of character and performance' (Marshall 2010: 39), instead I position them as part of Lawrence's self-reflexive rejection of, or ambivalence towards, conventional 'feeling rules' (Hochschild 1979, Kanai 2015). Moreover, in the final section of this chapter, I employ examples of fan-work from the blogging platform Tumblr, which locate and further highlight the contradictory, affective, and arguably feminist, potential of Lawrence's performance. Of course, as a film star and media celebrity, Lawrence's authenticity and feminist subjectivity are bound to her self-brand, which problematically codes her identity in terms of her white, middle-class privilege. Neoliberal, entrepreneurial pursuits are normalised as part of the logic of a converged media culture, demanding that

negotiations of personal feminist politics are done within an all-encompassing consumer culture (Keller 2015: 280-81). As I argue, however, Lawrence's resistance to using personal social media practices, in particular, demonstrates some resistance to these norms.

Concerns regarding the commodification and branding of feminist messages within a neoliberal culture, addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, are extended further still in Chapter 3 via a focus on the outspoken feminist identity of Lena Dunham. At this particular juncture wherein feminism is experiencing something of a revival in popular culture (Banet-Weiser 2015a, Gill 2016a, Zeisler 2016), particularly in the circles of celebrity (Taylor 2014, Hamad and Taylor 2015), analysis of the labour or 'gendered practices' (Keller 2015) inherent in the performances of prominent girl figures like Dunham, is particularly pertinent towards a better understanding of how girlhood functions as a key site within this revival of feminism. As with Lawrence, the oscillations between Dunham's on-screen performance in her television series, *Girls*, and her wider celebrity persona, contribute to an important self-reflexive star image which works to critique strictures of (post)feminism, femininity, and stardom.

As with my analysis of Lawrence, in order to deconstruct the discursive and ideological significance of Dunham's performance and identifications with feminism, I draw on bodies of work across gender, media, celebrity, and cultural studies. Many current understandings of the gendered performance of celebrities, for example, are informed by the Butlerian conception of performativity, referring to the 'reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains' (Butler 1993: xii). Butler's theorising of gender as performed relies on the notion that 'identity is performatively constituted' – albeit not free-flowing – via actions, experiences, and 'expressions' that are said to be its results (1990: 34). These are useful conceptions when analysing the different iterations, gesticulations, movements, and expressive details that come to be recognised in celebrity performance, as well as recognising the possibility for a subject's agency to enact social change within the discursive limits in which they operate (Keller 2015: 277).

The field of celebrity studies has also benefited greatly from sociological perspectives as a means to think through the details of the extra-textual dimensions of self-production that accompany a celebrity's primary art forms, such as interviews, premieres, advertisements, and other endorsements (Marshall 2010: 39). Thinking through how this performativity extends to celebrities as subjects of constant and invasive surveillance under the (gendered) public gaze, as facilitated by paparazzi, gossip, and online sites (Marshall 2010: 39), is especially pertinent to Lawrence and Dunham. In order to demonstrate resistance to how her body is mediated through this gaze, Dunham often uses social media as a site of self-performance; uploading selfies of her semi-naked, "non-normative" form, or appropriated paparazzi photographs to Instagram in order to curate her own narrative about her 'unruly' femininity (Petersen 2017a).

In this sense, analysis of Dunham's celebrity practices helps to uncover a sense of 'being in contemporary society' (Dyer 1986: 7), as well as to work through questions relating to selfhood and its dichotomies, such as public/ private, authentic/ performed (Holmes 2005: 15). As Sean Redmond notes, 'the material' of celebrity bodies is key to a sense of individuation and, more importantly, can help identify the nuances of class, gender, race, and ethnicity in celebrity images and what these signify (2014: 11). Furthermore, aesthetics such as skin, hair, make-up, clothing, overall appearance, voice, posture, body language, emotion, and self-presentation on social media, are all becoming increasingly important to scholars mapping the different forms of labouring that go into a particular kind of work (Elias et al. 2017: 34-5). Thus, mapping the corporeal elements, or the 'aesthetic labour' (Elias et al. 2017) attendant with Dunham's (and Lawrence's) performance, form an important part of how I come to conceptualise their ideological and social constructions – and the problems inherent within them.

Although questions of race, class, and privilege are brought to the fore in all three of my case studies, the on-going struggles between a commodified project of the self and an emancipatory feminist movement are manifest most intensely in Dunham's celebrity feminist persona. The main thrust of my argument in Chapter 3 is that Dunham's transmedia performance, comprised of her social media presence, writings, acting, and

other creative projects (Woods 2015, Murray 2017), compels a revision of current understandings of feminism as shaped by celebrity. Requiring significant labour in order to produce a feminist position across these different media, including *Girls*, I argue that Dunham's writing and performance offers an important (re)negotiation of mediated spaces which engages with contemporary gendered issues and the messy terrains of postfeminism. It is the raced and classed nature of Dunham's creative outputs and online engagements, however, that complicate her feminist agenda.

Girls, in particular, has been a source of intense contention for scholars and cultural commentators, who note its whitewashed, 'monocultural' depiction of women in Brooklyn, New York (McCann 2017: 95; see also, for example, Stewart 2012 and Daalmans 2013). As Hannah McCann argues, this puts the series in something of a 'representational bind', as it seems to epitomise a generation of women in trying times (see Bell 2013, DeCarvalho 2013), yet fails to represent the diverse reality of the real cosmopolitan world beyond that lived by its white, middle-class, heterosexual protagonists (McCann 2017: 92). My analysis of Dunham's work in Chapter 3 begins by mapping out these critical points of debate, which have defined the emergence of *Girls* and its continued legacy in this complex moment for contemporary feminisms. As I demonstrate, Dunham's branded and entrepreneurial performance, to which *Girls* is key, occupies the seeming grey areas between the many proliferating conversations about feminism. The sometimes misguided and rather clumsy nature of her negotiations, particularly when engaging with issues of race and privilege, complicates Dunham's purported investment in an intersectional feminist agenda. While I go on to argue that these raced and classed negotiations benefit the visibility of feminism and its convolutions in the contemporary moment, Dunham's commodified self stands as a poignant reminder that '[p]olitics and popularity will always threaten to absorb each other' (Nash and Whelehan 2017: 5).

Nevertheless, scholars have made a case for *Girls* and Dunham in terms of how discourses of postfeminism and privilege are called up in the series in order to scrutinise their troubling affects for youth living in post-recession times – an America completely different to that experienced by their parents (Bell 2013: 364-65, DeCarvalho 2013).

Indeed, as Katherine Bell cogently suggests, in these narratives the coming of age process seems to be 'stalled in a passive temporal position, always "becoming"' as these girls struggle with the burdens of their position as 'disciplinary subjects' under an institutionalised neoliberalism (2013: 366). What we are seeing on-screen in *Girls*, then, is the labour of personal growth under neoliberalism. The series cleverly makes use of the dichotomy between girls and women through which to dramatise the mistakes, immaturity, and experimentation associated with the search for identity in the period of growth towards womanhood that is inherently 'part of the semantic field of the word "girl"' (Grdešić 2013: 356).

As such, *Girls* breaks with the postfeminist fantasies promised by its predecessor, *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). Through a re-articulation of postfeminism for a millennial generation (Nash and Grant 2015), *Girls* offers a messier version of girlhood, which unravels the 'patently false promises' of feminine desires familiar across postfeminist media texts (McDermott 2017: 56). The girls in *Girls* are flawed, self-absorbed, and even unlikeable, and rather than offering comforting images of friendship, love, sex, and success, the series invites discomfort and very little satisfaction in the stories that are told. As Sean Fuller and Driscoll note: 'The girls of *Girls* are, in fact, not the postfeminist 'new package of young female success' […] Rather than Harris's 'can-do' girls they are girls who should-be-able-to-but-don't' (2015: 257).

Together, then, the texts focused on throughout this thesis, and the performances at the centre of them, provide crucial insights into the important gendered work that is required of girls when negotiating feminism in the current moment through their complicated and provocative articulations.

CHAPTER ONE

Lisbeth Salander in Hollywood: Image and Commodification in David Fincher's *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011)

Stieg Larsson's *Millennium* trilogy of crime novels has achieved success on a global scale. In its entirety, the trilogy has sold over 60 million copies in more than 50 countries, with the first novel of the series, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* published posthumously in 2005 (translated from its original Swedish title, *Män som hatar kvinnor*, to *Men Who Hate Women* in 2008). The story revolves around the unexplained disappearance of Harriet Vanger 40 years prior, and the actions of investigative journalist, Mikael Blomkvist. Along with expert researcher and computer hacker, Lisbeth Salander, the pair uncover serialised murders of women and a web of corporate crime. The book is now considered to be a 'global cultural artifact', translated into 35 languages (Stenport and Alm 2009: 157). Following this literary success, a Swedish-Danish filmic adaptation of the same name was released to Scandinavian cinemas in 2009, directed by Niels Arden Oplev. The other two titles in the *Millennium* trilogy, *Flickan som lekte med elden,* literally translated as *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2009), and *Luftslottet som sprängdes* (meaning *The Castle In the Sky That Was Blown Apart*), translated as *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest* (2009), were also adapted to film in 2009; both directed by Daniel Alfredson.

The marketing of Larsson's novels proved successful and worked to create fresh anticipation for their visual adaptations, with North American audiences 'primed' for the release of the film adaptations (Gates 2013: 194).[1] *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* did respectfully well at the box office for a foreign-language film in spite of its modest budget of $13 million, grossing over $104 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo 2017b). The English-language film remake of the same name was released just two years later in

[1] The Swedish-Danish adaptations were originally intended for released as a TV mini-series of 6 episodes but it was later decided to release all three films to Scandinavian cinemas at a shorter running time. An extended version of the trilogy was later broadcast on Swedish networked-television channel SVT1 between March 20 and April 24, 2010 which comprised 6x90 minute-long episodes. This extended version also aired on French premium pay television channel Canal+ in the same year as well as on US pay-per-view cable networks during the weeks leading up to the release of David Fincher's English-language adaptation in December, 2011.

December of 2011, directed by David Fincher and produced by Sony Pictures.[2] Despite enjoying 'the kind of saturation opening typical for contemporary Hollywood productions', Fincher's film was disappointing against its expectations, grossing $232 million worldwide against a production budget of $90 million (Archer 2012: 2). In spite of these statistics, the film has proved significant in terms of how it represents the pivotal gendered themes of Larsson's Scandinavian crime novels to wider Hollywood film audiences. As I shall go on to argue in this chapter, the cultural specificity of Fincher's incarnation of Lisbeth Salander – the complicated 'girl' protagonist at the centre of Larsson's work – prompts important questions about the efficacy of feminist ideals rendered in this particular mainstream economy of production and representation.

Fincher himself consistently acknowledges – both textually and extratextually – the iconism attached to Lisbeth. Talking about the experience of shooting on location in Stockholm for the first time with actor Rooney Mara, the director alludes to the character's fictional renown in Sweden: "A lot of the Swedish crew was [sic] very sceptical about our motives for wanting to make the English language version of this movie […] Swedes are very protective of Lisbeth. She's part of their cultural landscape".[3] The roots of Lisbeth's character, and arguably the key to her cultural influence, can be linked with another prominent 'girl' hero from Swedish literature, Pippi Longstocking. Created by best-selling Swedish author Astrid Lindgren, the Longstocking series seemingly set a precedent in Swedish literature, being one of the country's largest international commercial successes before Larsson's work (Stenport and Alm 2009: 158). Acknowledged by Larsson himself as a source of inspiration for Lisbeth (Rising 2009) (although she is considerably older than nine-year-old Longstocking), there are evident similarities that can be drawn between the two characters. Both have grown up with an absence of parents and a lack of education – Longstocking did not have a formal education and Lisbeth dropped out of high

[2] It is worth noting that Swedish film and television production company, Yellow Bird (the company behind the Swedish-Danish film adaptations), purchased the rights to Larsson's novel soon after its release, meaning that they are given credit as co-producers of the Hollywood adaptation. For further discussion of the nature of the intellectual property and authenticity regarding Larsson's novels and both filmic adaptations, see Archer (2012).
[3] Quotation taken from Audio Commentary, special DVD feature.

school. Nevertheless, both characters are extraordinary, particularly in terms of the eccentricities that they both possess. For instance, Longstocking has superhuman strength and Lisbeth has a photographic memory. Both possess a strong sense of justice, are prone to displays of anger and violence, and at times, reject establishment rules and regulations, leading to their reputation as social misfits. A number of references to Longstocking are made in Larsson's first novel, most notably by her employer, Dragan Armansky, who admits: 'On more than one occasion he had thought of Salander as precisely Pippi Longstocking' (Larsson 2008: 53). Both of these characters originated from Swedish culture but now bear an international significance in terms of their popularity.

Arguably, the English renaming of Larsson's original Swedish title, from *Men Who Hate Women* to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, can be seen as a reflection of Lisbeth's character status beyond Sweden; beginning with the success of the original Oplev-Alfredson adaptations and accelerated by her Hollywood incarnation. The continued adaptation of these works in both literary and filmic form are further indication of the impetus of this character and the *Millennium* narratives in popular culture. Larsson's work has influenced two further book titles: *The Girl in the Spider's Web* (2015) and *The Girl Who Takes An Eye for An Eye* (2017), both from David Lagercrantz. A filmic adaptation of the former is due to be released to cinemas in 2018, produced by Sony Pictures, but notably without the involvement of Fincher, Mara, or Daniel Craig (as Blomkvist) (Lee 2017). As this chapter argues, the transnational movement of Larsson's work from Sweden to the United States, and from book to screen, has meant a shift in Lisbeth's cultural identity. Moving between different contexts and geographies, the character is no longer simply the Swedish cultural icon that Fincher acknowledges, but may also be seen as a reflection of Hollywood's commercial and political intentions.

The term 'girl' is not entirely a new addition by to Larsson's work as the English title of the author's second novel is in fact a literal translation. The marketing strategies for the first and third novels followed by each of the films, however, could arguably be seen as an attempt to create a recognisable brand within an anglophone commercial marketplace, profiting from 'the spectacularization of girls' that can be recognised across popular

culture more broadly (Projansky 2014: 5). Indeed, Lisbeth as a protagonist to be rooted for is arguably a more effective selling point than the darker subject matter made plain by Larsson's original title, referring to his protagonist's experience of violence and sexual assault at the hands of men. Exposing themes of misogynist violence and the way it manifests itself from both inside and outside of Swedish society seem to be central in Larsson's work. It is through Lisbeth's experiences and the investigations of Blomkvist that these themes of social and political corruption are brought to bear within the narratives of the three novels; all working to expose 'criminal activities that involve the systematic victimization of women' (Gates 2013: 195). We learn that Lisbeth experienced many traumatic events in her childhood: her mother was abused at the hands of Lisbeth's father which resulted in the legal intervention of the state and psychiatric institutionalisation.

In *Dragon Tattoo*, in particular, themes of rape, rape-revenge, and the cover up, as well as the deprecation of the violence and murder of women, make explicit that gender relations are central to the plot (Stenport and Alm 2009: 159). Nils Bjurman, Lisbeth's appointed state guardian, abuses his authority by extorting sexual favours from her in return for her financial welfare. During one occasion at his own apartment, Bjurman violently rapes Lisbeth which, unbenknownst to him, she was recording using a hidden camera in her backpack. Returning to his apartment at a later date to carry out her revenge, Lisbeth tasers Bjurman before restraining, gagging and anally raping him. Tied to the floor of his bedroom, Lisbeth forces her rapist to watch the footage she had captured on her previous visit, using it to blackmail him into granting her access to her own finances. As a warning to others and a physical stamp of her newfound power over him, she also tattoos the following words into his skin: 'I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST' (Larsson 2008: 244). In the novel's final act, Lisbeth continues her avenging actions on Martin Vanger, the serial killer who she and Blomkvist had worked together to expose. Following her pursuit of Vanger on her motorbike, Lisbeth then watches as he burns to death in his overturned car. Indeed, this participation in certain criminal activities means that Lisbeth too belongs in the fringes of society much like the men she is fighting to bring to justice. Her occupation as an exceptional computer

hacker means that she is constantly infringing upon the privacy of others but with the intent to expose gendered crimes and bring those responsible to justice.

As Anna Westerståhl Stenport and Cecelia Ovesdotter Alm argue of Larsson's protagonist, Lisbeth 'represents a popular-culture convention of individuality', whose gender construction intentionally works to communicate the novel's feminist stance (2009: 158). Reference to Lisbeth as a 'convention', however, also implies, as Stenport and Alm go on to note, that her individuality, even in the novel, is a commodified idea conforming to the 'formulaic narrative strategies of plot, character construction, and setting', helping to prime the *Millennium* trilogy for its domestic and international success (2009: 158). They go on to describe Lisbeth as 'a popular culture fantasy – adolescent-looking yet sexually experienced' (Stenport and Alm 2009: 168). In Larsson's work Lisbeth's appearance is central to her individuality and difference. Her choice of dark clothing, body piercings, tattoos, and bold hairstyles are introduced as an essential part of her 'otherness' through detailed descriptions by various focalising characters. Coupled with her socially awkward behaviour, Lisbeth is firmly positioned as an outsider. Even describing her adolescent self as '[a]n unloved girl with odd behaviour' (Larsson 2008: 214), Lisbeth sees herself as separated from the norms of society; in this sense, then, the way that she chooses to present herself could arguably be read as a reflection of her acceptance of this marginalisation.

As I consider in this analysis, however, notions of individuality are put in tension by commodification, with Lisbeth's difference interpreted as an intentional subversion of familiar conventions associated with gender and femininity, but not so different that her characterisation is seen to transgress certain recognisable cultural trends. This would suggest that her prominent positioning as part of a larger cultural product immediately fetters the authenticity of Lisbeth's character – and the feminist values that she supposedly personifies. Fincher's representation of the character's bold exterior in his filmic adaptation of *Dragon Tattoo* give these issues even greater resonance, seemingly exercising Hollywood's 'synergistic brand extension' (Maltby 2003: 208) through the commodification of such aesthetic elements. Replica slogan t-shirts and tribal horn

earrings are available to purchase from online retailers, as well as a collaborative fashion line from Swedish retailer, H&M, inspired by Lisbeth's on-screen wardrobe.[4] Part of Hollywood's synergy strategy, these aesthetic elements extend Lisbeth's identity beyond the diegesis and build 'a distinctive and reproducible iconography' (Maltby 2003: 206). In line with the other two case studies presented in this thesis, this chapter considers to what extent these commercial practices, along with the inherent transnational circulation of this girl character, impacts on how we read Lisbeth – or not – as a feminist character.

Both filmic adaptations of *Dragon Tattoo* have prompted charges of 'Americanizing' certain conventions and tropes from Scandinavian crime fiction in order to appeal to international audiences, arguably 'heteronormativizing Salander and presenting her as an American action hero' (Gates 2013: 193-95). Labelled as a postfeminist archetype in both popular and academic analyses (see, for example, Stenport and Alm 2009, Gates 2013, Projansky 2014, Smyth 2016), the ways in which the films present her avenging actions have also been read as part of this heteronormativizing process of Lisbeth. As Philippa Gates argues of the Swedish film, Lisbeth joins the female detectives of 1990s Hollywood, and the action babes of the early 2000s: 'Salander is at once both a sleuth like Starling [*Silence of the Lambs* (1991)] *and* a woman of action like Croft [*Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001, 2003)], wielding guns, axes, and golf clubs with the same dexterity as she handles her motorcycle and laptop keyboard' (2013: 200). In light of the representational politics identified in both filmic adaptations – which connect the representation of Lisbeth moreso with Hollywood depictions of women than those found in Scandinavian crime narratives (Povlsen and Waade 2009) – this is an apposite case study for exploring how postfeminism continues to animate discussion in popular culture (Gill 2016a, Gill 2016b).

As laid out in the discussion introducing this thesis, postfeminism is an ambiguous term and it is arguably this lack of clarity (in relation to its inconsistency and precise definition), that enables it to function as a 'productive irritation', keeping 'feminist discourse alive in contemporary popular culture' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 253). Postfeminist

[4] Selected products can be found at www.amazon.com and www.amazon.co.uk. 'The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo for H&M' fashion line was launched in December of 2011, preceding the film's release to cinemas.

discourses rarely explicitly reject feminist politics; 'rather it is by virtue of feminism's success that it is seen to have been superseded' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 5). In light of the 'new cultural life of feminism' (Gill 2016a, Gill 2016b), postfeminist discourse continues to interrogate the complexities of neoliberalism (Gill and Scharff 2011:7), and also works to expose the contradictions between narratives of individual empowerment and the wider systems of (gendered) repression (see, for example, Harris 2004, McRobbie 2007, McRobbie 2009, Negra and Tasker 2014). As Yvonne Tasker explains, postfeminism is manifest most vividly in images of female empowerment that are centrally inscribed in western culture (2011: 68). Such discourses emphasise womens' achievements, foregrounding their freedoms of choice, lifestyle, and appearance; but which can only be celebrated if figured in appropriately feminine terms (Tasker 2011: 69). *Dragon Tattoo*, however – both in its literary and filmic forms – troubles such gendered sensibilities through Lisbeth's embodiment.

It is Lisbeth's aesthetic individuality, namely her androgyny, bisexuality, subversivesness, and social isolation, which means that she cannot be so easily embraced or celebrated for her 'girl power' like her postfeminist counterparts (Gates 2013: 200). Indeed, iconic women characters from the action genre – Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie), Rogue (Anna Paquin) and Storm (Halle Berry) from *X-Men* (2000-2006) – are governed by strong codes and conventions that work to retain or accentuate an idealised femininity. As Tasker suggests: 'The post-feminist character of the action heroines [are] physically strong, independent though often emotionally vulnerable, typically glamorous and even overtly sexy' (2004: 9). Lisbeth's "unusual" and subversive physicality (at least in relation to that which is deemed conventional noted here), does not strictly code her as empowering; instead we see her body used as an instrument of male brutality and gendered violence. These themes keep feminism at the fore of Larsson's work, with Lisbeth occupying the role of avenger to enact justice for the crimes against herself and other women. As Gates puts it, however, the presence of Lisbeth in *Dragon Tattoo* 'makes things messy', for the violence she perpetrates, as well as her own victimisation, means that she occupies all three roles typically associated with crime narratives: the detective,

the victim and the criminal (2013: 200). It is this 'messiness' that will be the focus of my analysis, as I unpack the complexities of gender, embodiment, and feminist empowerment that are accentuated by the Hollywood rendering of Lisbeth.

Throughout this chapter I refer to the Hollywood adaptation of *Dragon Tattoo* as 'Fincher's' in order to emphasise the significance of this gendered authorship, particularly in relation to the politics of Lisbeth's representation. Fincher as a director is worthy of attention, here, not least because of his transparent approach to the controversy that his film knowingly provokes: 'I know we are playing into the European, and certainly the Swedish, predisposition that this is a giant monetary land grab. You're co-opting a phenomenon' (Fincher in Hoad 2011). As some have mused, perhaps *Dragon Tattoo* is 'a step towards a new kind of remake for the era of international box office', where 'foreignness can be a selling point' for Hollywood films (Hoad 2011). Situating this analysis of *Dragon Tattoo* within the wider context of Fincher's work seems pertinent, therefore; not least because of the ways in which the director's 'auteur' style can be thought to encourage a sense of visual spectacle – to which Lisbeth is central. The ways in which Fincher has made his own stamp on the film and, indeed, on the character of Lisbeth more specifically, also speaks to some of the broader questions addressed in this thesis; namely how feminist themes, values, and ideas (like those conveyed in Larsson's work), are so easily co-opted – and arguably diluted – in the popular culture surrounding the figure of the 'girl'.

In terms of the organisation of this chapter, I begin with a discussion of Larsson's authorship, focusing in particular on his use of masculine focalisation which produces a gendered way of looking at Lisbeth. I also discuss how this functions in Fincher's film, thus setting up some of the main points of debate surrounding the Hollywood incarnation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011). I then move on in the second part of this chapter, to address the representational politics of the film more explicitly. Here, I draw out the tensions between Lisbeth's feminist origins and wider postfeminist archetypes, such as the action hero. The third and fourth parts of the chapter narrow down the focus of this tension with a closer inspection of aesthetics. Through close analysis of the Swedish and

American portrayals of Lisbeth, I draw mise-en-scènic comparisons between the costume, hair, and make-up choices. In this discussion I explore how, in Fincher's film, a commodification of such aesthetic elements engages with Hollywood's commercial and political intentions, while belieing those of Larsson. The final part of the chapter brings these ethical debates together with respect to the representation of rape in both filmic adaptations and their specificity in a wider rape culture. Overall my intention in this chapter is to explore the nature of Fincher's incarnation of Lisbeth Salander, considering the ethical and cultural implications of this image and its bearing on the broader issues regarding postfeminist representations of women in contemporary film.

Looking at Lisbeth: From Larsson to Fincher

Like the other fictional characters who are partly the subjects of the subsequent analyses in this thesis, Lisbeth Salander is a girl figure at the centre of a popular cultural text. It is the sexual politics of *Dragon Tattoo*, however, which set her apart from her postfeminist counterparts. Unlike Katniss Everdeen and Hannah Horvath (as well as the famous 'girls' who bring them to life on-screen, or even create them in Dunham's case), Lisbeth is largely constructed by, and in relation to, a male point of view. Larsson's authorship – despite presenting important gendered themes – raises certain questions regarding how women are conceived and perceived in his literary trilogy. As Kirsten Møllegaard argues of Larsson's first novel, Lisbeth is defined largely by her professional, as well as sexual, relationship with investigative journalist, Mikael Blomkvist (2016: 348), notably 18 years her senior. Indeed, it is Blomkvist's life (both public and private), which Lisbeth is employed to investigate, and it is due to his own work to solve Harriet Vanger's disappearance that precipitates their meeting. Further, Larsson's narrative focus on Lisbeth's body – how this is seen by male characters and how she sees herself – simultaneously constructs her as both 'other' *and* as 'locus of desire' to a voyeuristic gaze, along with its attendant '(un)pleasures' (Møllegaard 2016: 348). By extension, Fincher's adaptation of *Dragon* Tattoo consistently frames Lisbeth, albeit ambiguously, as the subject of spectacle – as someone *to be looked at*. In this section of the chapter, then, I

consider this gendered authorship and the ambivalence it creates from a feminist perspective.

Dragon Tattoo explicitly grounds its narrative in a wider social and political backdrop which evidences that the work of feminism is yet to be done: the epigraphs at the start of each of the novel's four parts, documenting frightening statistics regarding the sexual abuse of women in Sweden, effectively foreshadows his stories and the broader patterns of violence they are situated within (Larsson 2008: 15, 121, 253, 407). Notably, inspiration for the novel, and for the character of Lisbeth specifically, was thought to stem from Larsson's own experience as a younger boy, bearing witness to a girl being gang-raped by teenagers near his hometown. The guilt of watching the crime unfold had purportedly inspired Larsson to advocate for womens' rights, but the validity of this story has since been called into question by charges that the author had simply used it second-hand to further embellish his work (Rich 2011). The fact that Larsson's first novel prioritises the exposure of corporate crimes over crimes against women, which are never brought to trial or public awareness (Stenport and Alm 2009: 161), also seems to run counter to the author's implicit motivations. Although this perhaps was Larsson's intention, giving light to the social and political realities faced by those women who never receive justice or are stigmatised for the crimes committed against them, this approach nevertheless seems to endorse 'a pragmatic acceptance of a neoliberal world order' that is, among other things, misogynistic (Stenport and Alm 2009: 158). Some have argued on the contrary, however, that Larsson's portrayal of men's violence against women reflects a 'feminist, sociological understanding', in that it is presented as structural, not merely violent, and part of a 'systemic, institutional system of inequality' which extends beyond 'the actions of a few bad men' (Ferber 2012: 6). Indeed, Larsson's trilogy covers various gendered crimes, including rape, sex trafficking, institutional abuse (both physical and psychological), sexual harassment, and other bestial assaults against women of all ages. This happens at a personal and professional level, thus presenting this as the pervasive social problem that it is.

It is through Lisbeth's investigations that this world is navigated as she puts up a fight against such systemic, institutionalised violence. As Stenport and Alm argue, however, 'fiscal individualism becomes the end and not the means of a democracy' in *Dragon Tattoo* (2012: 129). It is Lisbeth, they argue, who 'decouples gender politics from the state in a conservative turn to executive power of the individual' (Stenport and Alm 2012: 130). Through her independent actions, with no help from the state or the law, Lisbeth uses violence and her own skill with technology to vindicate herself and other women, meanwhile 'projecting the benefits of an individualized and neoliberal society' (Stenport and Alm 2012: 130). As well as avenging her own rape by her state-appointed guardian, Lisbeth desperately seeks to take control of her own finances. Moreover, at the end of *Dragon Tattoo*, she illegally secures $260 million from the secret bank account of Hans-Erik Wennerström, the corrupt billionaire who was the subject of Blomkvist's journalistic investigations. While this shows Lisbeth to be a capable and free agent, this can also be seen as downplaying any interventions from the state, as well as the importance of feminist solidarity among women (and men) within a misogynist world order (Stenport and Alm 2012: 129-30). In this sense, Larsson's character shares much in common with 'the figure of woman as empowered consumer' in postfeminist popular culture – a trope identified by Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra (2007) among others – which helps to naturalise a commodified, depoliticised form of feminism via capitalist means (in Stenport and Alm 2012: 129). A hero in postfeminist times, then, Lisbeth's agency is somewhat tethered to a neoliberal individualism which undermines the collective change which feminism seeks to put into action. This is not to suggest that Lisbeth's individual agency ought to be dismissed, but rather that her characterisation speaks to broader concerns regarding the efficacy and ambiguity of feminism in popular culture.

Before shifting the focus of my analysis towards Fincher's film, I want to consider Larsson's presentation of his central protagonist in more detail. Depicted as psychologically and sexually complex, exuding gender ambiguity through her self-presentation, Lisbeth embodies difference and defiance in the face of a misogynist world

order, which carries feminist connotations in and of itself (Lorber 2012: 61). It is how these complexities are rendered, however – as something to be investigated by men or, indeed, by Larsson himself (Vishnevetsky 2011) – which engenders ambivalence from a feminist perspective. Larsson's initial descriptions of Lisbeth immediately calls attention to her otherness through the eyes of her male boss at Milton Security company, Dragan Armansky:

> Armansky's star researcher was a pale, anorexic young woman who had hair as short as a fuse, and a pierced nose and eyebrows. She had a wasp tattoo about two centimetres long on her neck, a tattooed loop around the biceps of her left arm and another around her left ankle. On those occasions when she had been wearing a tank top, Armansky also saw that she had a dragon tattoo on her left shoulder blade. She was a natural redhead, but she dyed her hair raven black. She looked as though she had just emerged from a week-long orgy with a gang of hard rockers. (Larsson 2008: 41-2)

Lisbeth's embodiment is central to this otherness – particularly her various body modifications such as tattoos and piercings – which are seen as separate or distinctive in the context of Milton Security: a company whose 'image was one of conservative stability' (Larsson 2008: 41). Larsson effectively sets Lisbeth apart from this stable and conventional picture of corporate life in respect to her boss, who suggests that she fits within this environment 'about as well as a buffalo at a boat show' (Larsson 2008: 41). Lisbeth's relationship with her colleagues (or lack thereof) also foregrounds her separation from, or indifference to, the social norms in the workplace: 'Her attitude encouraged neither trust nor friendship, and she quickly became an outsider wandering the corridors of Milton like a stray cat' (Larsson 2008: 43). Significantly, through Armansky's point of view, we are given a very meticulous – even scopic – description of Lisbeth's physical attributes: 'She was a natural redhead, *but* she dyed her hair raven black' (Larsson 2008: 42 [emphasis added]). Such details hint towards a greater level of intimacy between the two characters but, more importantly, positions Lisbeth's body as a source of erotic fascination.

Armansky is able to provide detailed narration of Lisbeth's body, signalling an erotic interest: 'Sometimes she wore black lipstick, and in spite of the tattoos and the pierced nose and eyebrows she was… well… attractive. It was inexplicable' (Larsson

2008: 42). As Møllegaard suggests: Lisbeth's various body modifcations 'triggers Armansky's fantasy about orgies and sexual excess, and his middle-class biases surface as the social discourse within which Salander's body art and attire signal counterculture and marginality' (2016: 358). This gendered and classed bias is emphasised more explicitly through the polarity Armanksy sets up between Lisbeth's physical attributes and those of the women he is usually attracted to: 'blonde and curvaceous, with full lips that aroused his fantasies', while Lisbeth, on the other hand, is 'flat-chested' and could easily be mistaken for a skinny boy (Larsson 2008: 46).[5] Nevertheless, he describes Lisbeth as 'a nagging itch, repellent and at the same time tempting' (Larsson 2008: 46). This, along with knowledge of a previous marital indiscretion, purposefully instills doubt in the reader as to Armansky's intentions towards Lisbeth. Notably, Armansky never acts on his sexual feelings but it is via his point of view that Lisbeth is seen (and introduced to the narrative) through a gendered, sexual lens.

Further, Armansky's conflicting feelings – which are arguably rooted in cultural mysteries pertaining to the 'exotic' female body, as well as the symbolic significance of body art as painful – draw attention to the complex negotiations of pleasure/ (un)pleasure that Lisbeth evokes in men (Møllegaard 2016: 358). Indeed, the darker nature of the relationship between violence and pleasure is also borne out in the sadistic violence that is later inflicted on Lisbeth by her state guardian. Moreover, as I return to later in the chapter, the filmic representations of *Dragon Tattoo* are underlined by wider discourses regarding the visual pleasures of looking at rape and sexual violence on-screen. The 'vivid descriptions' of Lisbeth's physical appearance in text and on screen are integral to Larsson's portrait of misogyny but this nevertheless elicits questions regarding the role that this kind of narration plays in the subordination of women (Valentine 2012: 88). Of

[5] Worthy of note is how Lisbeth's own self-perception is tempered by a failure to live up to this ideal of femininity which motivates Armansky's desires: 'She was convinced that her skinny body was repulsive. Her breasts were pathetic. She had no hips to speak of' (Larsson 2008: 364). Significantly in *Played with Fire*, Lisbeth undergoes breast enlargement surgery, insisting that this 'improved her quality of life' (2009: 16). This plot point presents an uneasy tension in that the surgery may be deemed as a demonstration of Lisbeth's bodily autonomy on the one hand, but on the other, represents the gravity of a culture wherein the 'relentless sexualization of women serves to undermine women's self-esteem and confidence' [see Wolf 1991] (De Welde 2012: 23).

significance, here, is how Lisbeth's body is given detailed narration throughout Larsson's trilogy which is not replicated in terms of how he presents the bodies of his male characters. Further, the male focalisation centralises Lisbeth's body as an 'unstable signifier' for male visual pleasure/ (un)pleasure, thus making her the object of a sexualised gaze (Møllegaard 2016: 357). Even Lisbeth's attempts to signify her difference visually, then – a political act which provides a provocative counter discourse that attempts to valorise what is devalued in dominant culture – are bounded by the kind of voyeurism typically associated with cinematic scopophilia and its erotic overtones (Møllegaard 2016: 352-55) through Larsson's authorship.

According to the canonical work of Laura Mulvey, cinematic voyeurism (namely that of classical mainstream narrative film) is governed by a strict sexual imbalance between 'active/male and passive/female' ([1975] 2009: 19). Such an imbalance is thought to set up typically gendered and sexed looking relations in film whereby the female figure is 'coded for strong visual and erotic impact' and thus works to 'connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey [1975] 2009: 19). In theorising the visual pleasures derived from cinema, Mulvey uses scopophilia to explain how woman is displayed as sexual object, subjected to a fetishizing, 'controlling and curious gaze', which codes desire and the erotic 'into the language of the dominant patriarchal order' ([1975] 2009: 16-7). These theoretical ideas have since been challenged, notably by Mulvey (1981) herself, and further refined to accommodate for differences in spectatorship along the lines of race, gender, and sexuality (see, for example, Dyer 1979, Dyer 1986, and hooks 1992). Despite criticism of Mulvey's male gaze as a monolithic notion, which is implicitly heterosexual (see, for example, Wheatley 2015: 898), these ideas continue to be influential in feminist scholarship. As Rosalind Gill notes, the gaze is but one way in which to think about the surveillance of women's bodies across the fields of media, cultural, and gender studies; among others, such as John Berger's (1972) 'ways of seeing' and, more recently, Sarah Projansky's (2014) 'spectacular girls', these scholarly interventions attempt to work through the ideological effects of a contemporary media culture which is saturated with, and constantly encourages us to look at, girls and young women (Gill 2018 forthcoming).

Like all three of the case studies in this thesis, then, Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo* should be considered as part of this broader cultural context in terms of the ways in which it explicitly positions Lisbeth 'to be looked at.'

Figure 1.1 Dragan Armansky (Goran Višnjić).

Figure 1.2 Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara).

Figure 1.3 Lisbeth skulking through the offices of Milton Security.

Figure 1.4 Lisbeth approaching the office where Armansky and Dirche Frode (Steven Berkoff) wait.

Figure 1.5 Setting out suspense before Lisbeth's entrance.

Figure 1.6 Spatial interplay between Lisbeth and the two men setting up discrepancy in public power relations.

Figure 1.7 Lisbeth as 'psychically and socially isolated'.

Like Larsson, Fincher frames Lisbeth's first appearance on-screen in *Dragon Tattoo* through a masculine point of view but in a way that lends more ambiguity to her character. The scene begins with Armansky (Goran Višnjić) and Dirch Frode (Steven Berkoff) waiting for Lisbeth's arrival; already late for the meeting, she has been called into Milton's office to discuss her latest research assignment about Blomkvist. A tracking shot of Lisbeth riding in on her motorbike is followed by a mid-shot of Armansky in dialogue with Frode: "No one here particularly likes her…I find it better if she works from home." The scene continues in this manner, shifting perspectives between Lisbeth and the two men, whose dialogue heightens the anticipation of her arrival (Figures 1.1 and 1.2). Armansky's remarks clearly manifest his scepticism about how his star researcher will come across to others: "She's one of the best investigators I have as you saw from her report […] I'm concerned you won't like her. She's different […] In every way."

Lisbeth makes her way through the building with the camera always positioned behind her right shoulder, capturing the uneasy reactions of the other workers as she skulks past quickly (Figures 1.3). We only catch short glimpses of Lisbeth, which highlight particular features and mannerisms like her Mohawk hairstyle, her earrings and wasp tattoo, and the way she wipes her nose with the back of her left hand (Figure 1.2 and 1.4). Lisbeth is immediately established as an outsider in this scene, operating on the fringes of this environment. She is clearly unable – or, unwilling, even – to deal with the people

around her. Moreover, the overhanging dialogue, which provides objective statements about Lisbeth's socially-awkward personality and behaviour, intercut with subjective, albeit detached, shots of her face and upper body, creates a tension heretofore present in Larsson's novel; in other words, a discrepancy between Lisbeth's performance of identity and the perspections held by those (mainly men) around her.

The mechanics of this sequence in the first ten minutes of the film work to pique our interest in Lisbeth; each shot intentionally keeps Lisbeth at a distance while still inviting fascination. We are continuously denied identification until Lisbeth's eventual arrival at the office where Armansky and Frode wait; it is only upon her entrance into the room that her face and figure are shown in their entirety (for previously Lisbeth is partly obscured by venetian blinds in a shot from inside the office (Figure 1.5)). Notably, we see the reactions of the two men before we see Lisbeth: the camera tilts upwards to track Frode's surprised expression, standing rigidly before breaking out into a nervous smile. With Frode to the left of the frame, the camera follows Lisbeth as she sits down at the opposite end of a large conference table, seemingly ignoring his greeting and avoiding eye contact. As well as setting up her otherness in this corporate context, this spatial interplay effectively separates Lisbeth from the two men, suggesting her 'psychic and social isolation' as well as 'the discrepancy in public power between Salander and the male characters' (Archer 2012: 8) (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7). This kind of introduction to the diegesis seemingly plays on the preconceptions the audience may already have about Lisbeth. Knowledge of Larsson's original material, the Swedish-Danish adaptations, or of the actors within the film text, could all contribute to a heightened sense of anticipation surrounding 'the girl with the dragon tattoo' before she makes her first appearance.

Despite the obvious sense of spectacle surrounding Fincher's Lisbeth, recent work on his films has highlighted how the director's aesthetic choices further enhance the enigmatic qualities of his subjects. Vashi Nedomansky notes the clarity of Fincher's colour palette, keeping 'clean and legible blacks' which creates a sense of 'ambiguous sunlight and endless night' in a winter setting (2013). This kind of visual aesthetic keeps everything legible while reflecting the dark tone of Fincher's content: 'Characters are shrouded in low

light levels even in direct sunlight. It's ominous, dread inducing and spectacular' (Nedomansky 2013). Neil Archer also notes how, in Fincher films, 'actors are frequently dark shapes against dazzling white backgrounds', an element of a wider authorial style which emphasises a level of ambiguity unusual for a 'Hollywood' film (2012: 10-12). As Ignatij Vishnevestsky suggests, predicated on this visual style is *Dragon Tattoo's* attention to investigative detail, whereby 'process-sequences' foreground everything '[i]n lieu of the usual hierarchy of major and minor action' (2011). This, in turn, eliminates 'evolving scenes of melodrama and replaces it with a montage-based cinema of this happened and then this happened and then this' (Kasman 2010).

Building on the work of Vishnevestsky (2011) and Kasman (2010), Archer suggests that their analyses draw attention to the way in which Fincher's films seem to favour a 'mood-based aesthetic of surface attention and obsessive detail' which arguably 'rethink[s] the concept of "narrative pleasure"' in that 'viewer engagement exists in terms of an enigma subject to our fascinated scrutiny' (2012: 12). This seemingly aligns the storytelling more closely with Larsson's, whose narrative is also 'forensic' and 'detail-driven' (Archer 2012: 12). As Vishnevestsky goes on to note: 'characters are reduced to their processes […] Action becomes the only visible facet of a personality' (2011). The scene of Lisbeth's meeting with Frode and Armansky ends abruptly with a sharp cut to her apartment. Lisbeth is shown filling a bowl of ramen with water; putting the bowl in the microwave; grabbing a can of Coca-Cola from her otherwise empty fridge; sitting at her Macbook to Google Dirch Frode; leaving her desk to retrieve the ramen from the microwave while the camera stays fixed on Blomkvist's email inbox (which she has purposefully maintained access to). Sequences like this reject a more classical mode of storytelling driven by character motivation (Archer 2012: 12). This approach is seemingly less emotive but perhaps more befitting of Larsson's character; Lisbeth is, after all, supposed to be 'unknowable, a force with considerable momentum and mysterious intentions' (Vishnevestsky 2011). Fincher's style can be seen to lend more ambiguity to Lisbeth, then, focusing on factual details rather than necessarily highlighting psychological depth. The absence of Lisbeth's subjective thoughts also adds a level of distance that is not granted

to readers of the novel. Moreover, Fincher's own 'degree of impassivity' through his form and composition (Vishnevestsky 2011) resists the overt gender bias and class prejudice which problematises Larsson's gendered narration, as previously discussed.

This is not to say, however, that Lisbeth is not a source of spectacle and visual pleasure in Fincher's film. Her first appearance on-screen, and in similar ways throughout the film, are illustrative of Mulvey's theorisation of the 'fragmented body' which lends 'flatness' and the 'quality of a cut-out or icon, rather than verisimilitude' to the screen image (2009: 20). Indeed, the 'hyper-real look' of Fincher's films (Nedomansky 2013) enhances detail almost to the point of distraction. Further, the focus on process and surface-level detail in relation to particular characters, although offering narrative progression that is not typical of notional understandings of 'Hollywood' (Archer 2012: 12), nevertheless help align the world of *Dragon Tattoo* with Fincher's. Lisbeth's hair, tattoos, clothing, accessories, and even the brands that she consumes knowingly position her within a wider oevre which reflects the global and economic imperatives of Hollywood. As others have noted, it is the consistency in form and construction across Fincher's projects which means that every character becomes a Fincher character (Vishnevestsky 2011). It is in the subsequent sections of this chapter that I ask what is at stake for Lisbeth and her origins as a feminist character by virtue of her re-presentation as a Fincherian hero. What is more, should Lisbeth be a hero at all?

Lisbeth in Hollywood: Feminist Avenger or Postfeminist Action Hero?

The two filmic adaptations of *Dragon Tattoo*, with their aesthetic, stylistic, and narrative differences, some of which I will go on to discuss here, have provoked an interesting debate about the kind of dialogue which informs such a discourse around Hollywood remakes: specifically, how the transnational circulation of Larsson's work on-screen may help us to question what particular ideas underpin historical binary divisions between European and Hollywood cinema (see, for example, Archer 2012 and Mazdon 2015). Fincher's work, in particular, has been considered to present a challenge to the negative stereotypes which dominate accounts of a Europe to Hollywood remake (Mazdon 2017:

27). The nuances of Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo* should not be overlooked, then; or to put it as Lucy Mazdon does, the film should be considered as 'so much more than an attempt to make an easy buck' (2015: 210).

Fincher's adaptation is particularly noteworthy in terms of how it overtly announces the ascension of Larsson's work to 'global media-brand status' while also retaining the 'Swedishness' of its source material (Hoad 2011). The opening title sequence, for instance, arguably reads 'Scandinavian crime fiction as 007 extravaganza' (Hoad 2011). Karen O's cover of Led Zeppelin's hit, 'Immigrant Song', overlays a series of visually striking vignettes: black tar oozing over the crevices of computer keyboards; engulfing writhing bodies; a phoenix ablaze rising from the ashes. Despite this nod to the film's global audience, such stylistic and thematic elements are reminiscent of the director's earlier outputs like *Se7en* (1995) and *Zodiac* (2007), encouraging critics to read *Dragon Tattoo* as a 'Fincher movie' (Mazdon 2017: 28). Moreover, the recurrent trope in Fincher's work of a socially disfunctional character as the central narrative focus, further complicates the status of his *Dragon Tattoo* as a remake (Mazdon 2017: 28). It is not, however, the fidelity of Fincher's film to the original source material per se that is the subject of my analysis. Rather it is the ways in which Lisbeth is re-presented through Fincher's authorial lens, and the cultural and gendered politics that are at work. After all, the Hollywood adaptation of *Dragon Tattoo* does emerge from a wider postfeminist context in which multiple meanings of femininity are inherent.

Differences between Larsson's novels and how these have been adapted to screen by both Fincher and Oplev have precipitated much scholarship questioning how the change in medium has affected the representation of the gendered characters, namely Lisbeth and Blomkvist. While Oplev's Swedish-Danish version of *Dragon Tattoo* has been examined for the ways in which it emphasises melodrama and action typical of a film marketed to a global mass audience (Povlsen and Waade 2009), Fincher's has been scrutinised for pushing Lisbeth 'firmly into the role of superhero and action babe' (Gates 2013: 211). In terms of gender and cinematic representation, the action genre typically embodies several contradictions in terms of the representation of women and their bodies.

As Tasker argues in her extensive work on this genre, there seems to be a 'simultaneous commitment to female strength and feminine passivity' apparent across many Hollywood genres (2011: 69). As she goes on: 'what postfeminist culture deems to be a sign of empowerment routinely emerges as an accommodation to, and acceptance of, a diminished role for women', where positions of 'passivity, malleability, and a broad willingness to sacrifice self for others' align women characters to the same stereotypical paradigms (Tasker 2011: 69). Even outside of the action genre, images of female empowerment permeate popular culture to promote freedom of choice, lifestyle and appearance, all of which can only be celebrated when figured in appropriately feminine terms.

Precedence for the Hollywood action heroine in recent years has seen a number of character archetypes arise offering more of an articulation of gender and sexuality which foregrounds a combination of both conventionally masculine and feminine elements (Tasker 1998: 68). The last decade especially has seen a rise in films which portray the female body as considerably active whilst still maintaining conventional markers of femininity (Purse 2011: 186). Representations of women in action films arguably enact what Lisa Purse refers to as 'a sexualized femininity to which display is central', intending to provoke sexual desire and erotic interest (2011: 188). Perhaps the most iconic of such portrayals is seen in films such as *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003). Both narratives see Croft go through numerous sequences that test her physical strength and agility with little evidence of damage to her body and make-up, therefore maintaining her normative femininity throughout such 'masculine' displays of action. Such conventions are typical of what Marc O'Day refers to as 'action babe cinema', where women heroes like Croft function simultaneously as action subject and object of erotic spectacle (2004: 203). The action babe combines traits of successful hegemonic femininity, such as intuition and charm, with those of hegemonic masculinity, such as toughness and decisiveness, along with a physicality which blends

elements of the 'soft' body of woman and the 'hard' body of man (O'Day 2004: 205).[6] Further, costuming and camera framing helps to draw attention to the action hero's combination of strength and skill, along with a more traditionally feminine – often 'emphatically sexualised' – physique (Purse 2011: 187). A woman's agency, then, is often complexly bound to her physicality and represented in contradictory terms.

Larsson's work can be seen to present somewhat of a challenge to certain gendered tropes and assumptions, offering a complex view of violence and victimisation through the avenging actions of women. As Kristine De Welde notes, Larsson's women 'implicitly challenge the assumption that strength, power, and violence fall outside of women's capacities' by enacting a physical form of feminist resistance against misogyny (2012: 23-4). As the female hero of Larsson's stories, Lisbeth stands out among other women. She is incredibly strong, transgressing typical ideas of gender through her physicality and aggression towards men. Rather than affirming an idealised notion of femininity that is a staple of postfeminist culture, then, Lisbeth's body symbolises her vulnerability to male brutality. She is brutally raped, bruised, beaten and violated but Larsson refuses to limit Lisbeth's representation to her victimisation. In *The Girl Who Played with Fire* (2009), for example, Lisbeth comes close to death following several bullet wounds and being buried alive by her assailants. On the one hand this shows the extent to which she will retaliate against male violence; on the other, it is this level of invincibility that makes Lisbeth appear 'superhuman, thus perhaps distancing her efficacy and autonomy from the average woman' (De Welde 2012: 22). While positioning Lisbeth as 'the real hero of the story' in the filmic adaptations, her complex gender characterisation becomes subject to certain dramaturgical and creative choices which emphasise these heroic, superhuman, qualities in ways that may be easily understood by global audiences (Povlsen and Waade 2009). However, what began as a narrative about a complex and ambigious character, has arguably become almost two-dimensional in filmic form.

[6] It is worth noting, here, that the 'hard' body appears as gratifying as the 'soft' in a contemporary context, as fitness and strength are often equated with physical attractiveness within a wider culture where sport and body culture are becoming increasingly commercialised in the mainstream (O'Day 2004: 205).

For many, both film versions of *Dragon Tattoo* represent a 'softening' of Lisbeth (see, for example, Povlsen and Waade 2009, Bartyzel 2011, Gates 2013). As Karen Klitgaard Povlsen and Anne Marit Waade suggest, in its leaning towards melodrama, Oplev's Swedish-Danish film places emphasis on the developing 'love story' between Lisbeth and Blomkvist, which ultimately reinstates Lisbeth as a typically sensitive and feminine woman:

> Lisbeth gradually becomes more soft and careful; her black makeup, black lipstick and tough armour slowly disappear, her beautiful body and profile are revealed and her feelings and charm emerge. […] Because of Mikael's calm and emotionally open attitude towards her and Lisbeth's growing feelings for him, Lisbeth is transformed from a tough, black, distanced, heavily made-up person who smokes continuously into a naked, vulnerable, fragile person. (Povlsen and Waade 2009)

Lisbeth's character trajectory towards an opening up of her vulnerabilities could also be aligned with the clearer line which Oplev's film draws between Lisbeth's victimhood and the violent, vengeful actions that she enacts on men. As Monika Bartyzel notes, there is a 'suffocating, repetitive sense that Lisbeth is prey' in Oplev's film (2011), which shows her vulnerability but also draws attention to the pervasiveness of gendered violence. Lisbeth is attacked on the subway by a group of young men, for example, after she bumps in to one of them turning the corner of the subway. One man holds his arm around Lisbeth's throat, as another soaks her in beer. She bites and kicks her way out of the grip but is punched to the ground; only managing to fend off her attackers by punching back and waving the broken beer bottle violently, screaming: "Come again, you cunts!" The attack appears to be gendered, with Lisbeth's attackers drawing attention to the fact that she is a woman using the term "fucking bitch". Contrastingly, in Fincher's film this scene is an opportunity to see Lisbeth's physical abilities as opposed to her victimhood. As she walks through a crowded subway platform, a man steals Lisbeth's backpack. For a split-second Lisbeth looks around to see if anyone will come to her aid before pursuing the thief herself. The two become locked in a struggle on a moving escalator but it is Lisbeth who appears in control; she forces the thief to the floor before screaming aggressively in his face and sliding down the side of the escalator to safety. Lisbeth escapes unscathed using quick thinking, the only physical damage affecting her Macbook as opposed to herself.

The same can be said for the way in which Fincher frames Lisbeth as an effective and clever perpetrator in her rape-revenge; focusing less, if at all, on the emotional turmoil of her rape. Everything from the taser to the tattoo pen has been thought through methodically, as well as the instructions that she gives to Bjurman. Oplev's film sets up a more emotional tack, with Rapace's Lisbeth appearing to be driven by her anger: her teeth clenched and the veins in her neck clearly pronounced as she sodomises Bjurman. The low-level lighting creates dark shadows around her eyes further intensifying her look of anger, further emphasising the emotional damage Bjurman has wrought on her; even leaving the room to smoke a cigarette while playing back the recording of her rape for Bjurman who is bound to the floor by his arms and legs. Fincher's film shows this scene in a way more akin to his wider impassive form and direction (Vishnevestsky 2011). Rather than leaving the room while she plays the recording, Lisbeth simply lights a cigarette and sits in the corner. After sodomising Bjurman, she delivers some instructions in an apathetic, almost expressionless manner, casually jumping up to sit on a set of bedroom drawers as she does this. There is a slight wittiness to her otherwise very clear instructions which reveals the pleasure in her revenge that is hidden from her face: "Once you can sit again, which could be a while, I admit, we're going to go to my bank and tell them that I alone have access to my money. Nod. After that you will never contact me again." When she has finished giving her instructions she picks up Bjurman's trousers from the floor to retrieve his keys, commenting on their quality: "Ooh, Gabardine."

Lisbeth's additional visit to Bjurman in Fincher's film – which does not appear in Larsson's first novel – seems to firmly cement her transition from victim to perpetrator. Entering the elevator as he leaves his office, the camera is positioned behind Bjurman's head and slowly angles to the left to reveal a hooded Lisbeth in the corner. "How's your sex life?" she asks, before bringing the elevator to an emergency stop. It is evident that Bjurman is afraid of her as she questions him on the lack of enthusiasm shown in his last report. He winces as Lisbeth points her finger to his forehead: "and stop visiting tattoo-removal websites. Or I'll do it again…right here." This scene adds to Lisbeth's already sleuth-like character, which is visually confirmed by the raccoon-like eye make-up Lisbeth

dons for her revenge attack. A possible reference to Daryl Hannah's character, Pris, in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), the black mask signals Fincher's transparent play on popular convention. Elements such as fire, leather clothes, handguns, and a high-speed car chase which result in Martin Vanger's death later in the film, are also blatant signifiers of certain cinematic tropes from the action genre.

Gates argues that it is the moral positioning of the two films which sees 'the full Americanization of Larsson's twenty-first century Longstocking into a two-dimensional superhero (not unlike the comic-book, child vigilante, Hit-Girl of *Kick-Ass* (Vaughn 2010)) even down to the raccoon-like mask of make-up' (2013: 209-10). Indeed, Lisbeth's violence seems not only justified but *celebrated* by Fincher, ultimately channeling Larsson's character and gendered themes into a more 'recognizably Hollywood formula' (Gates 2013: 209, 195). While Larsson (and Oplev) highlight the troubling gender ambiguity involved in celebrating a woman's violence (Lorber 2012: 56), Fincher's film asks no such questions. In Oplev's film, Blomkvist is shown questioning Lisbeth on the morality of her choice to let Vanger burn to death. Fincher's Lisbeth, however, even loads her gun and approaches Vanger's overturned car, pulling her finger away from the trigger only when an explosion confirms his death.

The 'Americanization' of Lisbeth in Fincher's film (Bartyzel 2011, Gates 2013) has also been argued to affect the character's agency. Indeed, Mara's Lisbeth has her vengeful actions approved by Blomkvist before she pursues Vanger: "May I kill him?" Arguably Larsson or 'Rapace's Salander would never seek approval' from a man in this way (Newman 2012: 18). Newman also reads the final scene – in which Lisbeth hopes to gift Blomkvist with a leather jacket she had custome-made for him, only to find him walking arm-in-arm with his lover, Erika Berger (Robin Wright) – as indicative of 'a neediness' or 'a vulnerability that the girl in the books would never show' (2012: 18). This ending *does* remain closer to the novel, however, with Larsson intending to show Lisbeth's emotional attachment to Blomkvist, if only for a moment: 'The pain was so immediate and so fierce that Lisbeth stopped in mid-stride, incapable of movement […] She did nothing as thoughts swirled through her mind […] Finally she calmed down' (Larsson 2008: 541-2).

The final sentences suggest that she only allows herself this fleeting moment to feel hurt: 'She turned on her heel and went home to her newly spotless apartment. As she passed Zinkensdamm, it started to snow. She tossed Elvis into a skip' (Larsson 2008: 542). Discarding Blomkvist's expensive gift appears symbolic of this closure, here, as if discarding her painful feelings into the skip. Mara's Lisbeth, upon seeking approval and feelings from Blomkvist, perhaps alludes to a willingness, or desperation, to be 'normal' (Gates 2013: 210). This in itself, however, seems to be another signifier of how Lisbeth has been heteronormativised for more mainstream audiences: '[T]he American hero becomes ineffective when accepted into society and must remain an outsider to pursue justice for that society: Salander remains an unfettered, anti-social, and effective hero…ready for a sequel' (Gates 2013: 210).

Of course, there is no sequel by Fincher, but Sony Pictures continue with a reboot of the series: *The Girl in the Spider's Web* (2018), the first of the *Millennium* novels not penned by Larsson himself. The iconography of Lisbeth is once again to be reincarnated for Hollywood audiences. As already noted by scholars, Fincher's adaptation of the *Dragon Tattoo* deserves to be considered for the nuances that it presents (Archer 2012 and Mazdon 2015). From analyses which situate Fincher's film within broader discourses of gender and cinematic representation, however, it becomes clear that 'Mara's Lisbeth is seen through a Hollywood filter' (Bartyzel 2011). There is a knowingness and transparency to Fincher's authorship which seemingly revels in the visual spectacle that surrounds Lisbeth, in spite of the gendered politics underpinning her complex characterisation. It can be argued that the English translation of *Dragon Tattoo* has helped to grant Lisbeth agency within Larsson's narrative (and its sequels) 'as the "girl" who sets things in motion' (Møllegaard 2016: 349). But as Møllegaard goes on to note, it is 'the persuasive power of image: Salander's defiant glare and black punk attire' which also provides 'strong visual branding' for the films (2016: 349). Thus, Lisbeth's image – one of the key elements of her character and individuality – is easily co-opted and commodified to suit a Hollywood audience. In the next section I consider the representational politics of this filmic image in

more detail, drawing attention to the ways in which certain aesthetic choices help to align Fincher's Lisbeth with the ideal postfeminist subject.

Lisbeth's 'Looks': Visual Spectacle and Coding of the Body Under Postfeminist Logics

Both the Swedish and American filmic adaptations of *Dragon Tattoo* portray Larsson's hero in different ways aesthetically. In Oplev's film, Rapace takes on a very gothic appearance with heavy black eyeliner and lipstick, spiky accessories and knee-high platform boots. Mara's Lisbeth still commands the same presence with her appearance, but her baby-blue eyes underneath her bleached eyebrows completely transform the face by further opening it up under her straight, black fringe. Mara herself acknowledges the decision to bleach her eyebrows as one of the most important creative decisions made concerning the character of Lisbeth: "I personally think that bleaching the eyebrows was the best thing we ever did for the look of the character […] It really put our own stamp on it".[7] The eyebrows, a seemingly key feature of a 'feminine' appearance, are eradicated, creating a striking, arguably fairer appearance than Rapace, whose eyebrows further intensify her darkened eyes and glare from underneath her long, black fringe (see Figure 1.8). In postfeminist culture, femininity is increasingly defined as a bodily property, with the possession of a 'sexy body' presented in the media as women's key source of identity (Gill 2007a: 255). Moreover, such creative choices are not only significant in terms of how they emphasise Lisbeth's gender, but how this draws attention to her racial orientation. Certain camera angles, extended shot lengths and dark track lighting also further exaggerate and magnify this performance of race, as if fetishizing Lisbeth's whiteness. Idealised femininity in Western culture, for instance, is based on a well-maintained physical appearance: attributes such as long hair, a slender waist or physique, a fair (often, but not exclusively, white) complexion, and little or no body hair (Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b, Tasker and Negra 2007: 2). Such markers of femininity are also increasingly being linked with neoliberalism,

[7] Quotation taken from 'The Look of Salander' Blu-Ray featurette: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.* (2012). Film. Directed by David Fincher. [Blu-Ray]. UK: Sony Pictures.

in terms of the ambitiousness and middle-classness of its subjects; oriented towards success in both public and private spheres (Sherman 2011: 80, Gill and Scharff 2011). Aesthetics as well as narrative, then, help to align Mara's Lisbeth with the postfeminist subject.

Figure 1.8 Noomi Rapace (left) and Rooney Mara (right) as Lisbeth Salander.

These creative choices – the straight, black micro fringe contrasting with the fairness of the eyebrows – also exemplify, as has been noted by many critics, as an overall 'softening' of Lisbeth by Fincher. As Bartyzel puts it: 'Fincher's Lisbeth is not Larsson's. She is sexualized, softened, romanticized, and less empowered. Whether he intended this or not, it's what countless critics see […] they don't mind it – in fact most like it – but they've recognized it' (2011). Even from the early marketing of the film, Mara's Lisbeth bares more flesh than Rapace, signalling her alignment with the overtly sexualised female heroes that typify Hollywood's action genre: 'Rapace's fully clothed Salander was replaced with Mara's sexy Lisbeth – baring her ass for a tattoo, standing in front of wintry landscapes topless, straddling a bike in underwear and tights, or posing in a tutu' (Bartyzel 2011) (see Figure 1.9). The intense focus on women's bodies in postfeminist media

culture is part of the increasing sexualisation of contemporary culture, whereby young girls and women are frequently eroticised in public space and coded sexually across a variety of media texts (Gill 2007a: 256-57). The shift with Fincher's film is particularly significant, then, as the apparent sexualisation of Lisbeth provokes familiar questions about the fine line between objectification and subjectification that postfeminist media culture engenders (Gill 2007a: 258).

Figure 1.9 Rooney Mara as Lisbeth, photographed by Jean-Baptiste Mondino for *W Magazine*, February 2011. https://www.wmagazine.com/gallery/rooney-mara-girl-with-the-dragon-tattoo-lisbeth-salander-ss/all.

As I shall explore in more depth in the next section, the gendered politics surrounding this re-presentation are further troubled by the ideals thought to underpin Larsson's original work. As A. O. Scott notes, the disparity between Lisbeth's and Blomkvist's nakedness (we see more of Lisbeth's naked body in the film than we do Blomkvist's), 'is perfectly conventional […] but it also represents a failure of nerve and a betrayal of the sexual egalitarianism Lisbeth Salander argues for and represents' (2011). Indeed, Larsson's Lisbeth did not feel comfortable parading around in matching lingerie: 'When she tried them on [knickers and bra] that night she felt incredibly foolish. What she saw in the mirror was a thin, tattooed girl in grotesque underwear. She took them off and

threw them straight in the bin' (Larsson 2009: 85). Simplifying particular plot points into recognisable cinematic tropes – such as the sequence showing Lisbeth taking on an uber-feminine disguise as Irene Nesser – seemingly inspire 'a relief that Mara's Salander is a more relatable person' (Bartyzel 2011). As Bartyzel concludes, however, 'the entire point is that Lisbeth doesn't seem real' (2011).

Other noticeable elements of Fincher's shift to a more conventional image for Lisbeth can be seen in smaller details such as the replacement of Rapace's spiky choker necklace and knee-high platforms with Mara's dog tag and Caterpillar boots. The variety of hairstyles seen on Lisbeth in Fincher's film – ranging from a spiky Mohawk to messy, uneven bangs – contrast heavily to the limited number of styles seen on Rapace across all three of the Swedish films. Fincher seemed eager to develop this particular element of Lisbeth's appearance arguably to signal the passing of time. For costume designer, Trish Summerville, however, it was about Lisbeth "fading into the shadows" if she chooses to; looking "worn-in" and "kind of used" rather than drawing attention to herself. [8] Indeed, costuming is an important tool for communicating identity in terms of 'the multiple ways in which clothing interacts with the body in the formation of identity' (Bruzzi 1997: 199). The attention paid to the development of Lisbeth's different looks by Fincher demonstrates an understanding of this. More than this, however, Fincher has moulded Lisbeth's image so that it can easily function as 'a distinctive and reproducible iconography' (Maltby 2003: 206), extending her identity beyond that of the diegesis.

Mara's head in profile sporting a Mohawk, for example, has become a staple image for Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo*. Employed as part of the marketing material and DVD cover art, and incorporated in online fan-art, this potent image has an emblematic quality; working to promote instant recognition of the character. The image not only illustrates but confirms Lisbeth's appearance as fundamental to her status as a recognisable and arguably iconic girl character. Fincher himself has alluded to this iconography associated with Lisbeth's appearance when referring to Mara's micro fringe, for example. He notes that the scene showing Lisbeth looking out of a subway train window, the passing lights

[8] Ibid.

reflecting in her tears, makes her look "very Joan of Arc".[9] This reference to Renée Jeanne Falconetti's portrayal of Joan of Arc is significant in that it links Lisbeth with another iconic hero/ victim, whose facial features are emphasised by frequent close-ups, considered at the time of the film's release in 1928 to be a unique approach to cinematography. Rather than simply creating different expressions with Lisbeth's hairstyle, then, Fincher seems particularly mindful of the ways in which such features of the character can function iconographically. Indeed, as detailed in the introduction, it is both the performative and creative labour involved in the construction of these representations of girlhood, that can mould and help pull out the politics of these texts.

Similar in terms of its iconic implications is Lisbeth's ripped, oversized t-shirt which she is seen wearing during several scenes in the film. The t-shirt has an F-bomb caption emblazoned on the front in block capitals, which reads: 'FUCK YOU YOU FUCKING FUCK'. Already a famous quotation spoken by the notorious Frank Booth in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986), the caption symbolises Lisbeth's rebellious attitude. The insistence of Lisbeth's constantly changing wardrobe, rotating certain signature items like this t-shirt during the course of the film, seemingly displays a knowingness of convention. The development of different looks for Lisbeth, incorporating different hairstyles, t-shirts with snappy slogans, leather jackets, and jewellery, arguably draws attention to these aesthetics as if to make a spectacle of such details. The Oplev-Alfredson films, on the other hand, seemingly resist this by keeping Rapace's appearance consistent throughout the trilogy, with very minor changes throughout.

As well as making her character more identifiable for a global audience, Lisbeth's Fincher is also made more accessible via the commodification of her on-screen wardrobe. The caption t-shirt along with prop replica tribal horn earrings are available to purchase on websites such as Amazon, offering consumers the chance to emulate Lisbeth through her appearance. This commodification, which I shall argue is a key determining factor in Lisbeth's popularity, has created an interesting dynamic for a character that was arguably

[9] Quotation taken from Audio Commentary, special DVD feature: *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.* (2012). Film. Directed by David Fincher. [DVD]. UK: Sony Pictures.

never meant to be understood. Unlike other Hollywood women heroes – their costumes further affirming and 'protecting' their femininity (Purse 2011: 186) – Lisbeth's clothing is symbolic of much larger and more poignant issues, issues that go beyond the mere boundaries of representation. This particular portrayal, then, should not only be discussed in terms of representation but in relation to commodification, which as I shall now argue, opens up a new set of questions regarding Lisbeth's complex gender identity.

Commodified Individuality: The Politics of Lisbeth's Commercial Image

As I have unpacked thus far in this chapter, elements of Lisbeth's individual identity have been co-opted in Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo* to serve the commercial intentions of Hollywood. Indeed, as others have argued, Larsson's original representation itself exploits certain physical stereotypes of gender to further amplify Lisbeth's exceptional characteristics (Valentine 2012: 94), thus aligning her with a more Westernised, 'popular-culture convention of individuality' (Stenport and Alm 2009: 160). While Lisbeth presents somewhat of a challenge to Hollywood's action babes, 'clad in spectacular outfits that cling to and highlight their femininity – curvaceous breasts, hips, and buttocks – and presented as distinctly heterosexual, politically conservative, and socially desirable', her gendered otherness is easily 'Americanized' in both filmic adaptations to suit a wider, transnational audience (Gates 2013: 200). To a greater extent in Fincher's film, the commodification of certain aesthetic elements of Lisbeth's image reflect the pervasive nature of a postfeminist media culture, which arguably undermines the efficacy of gendered politics via the commodification of female empowerment. As Angela McRobbie argues, a 'double entanglement' exists in this contemporary neoliberal time, whereby feminism is often 'taken into account' in popular and political culture only to be repudiated (McRobbie 2009: 12). It is this ethical tension, concerning the feminist politics underpinning *Dragon Tattoo* and how these are commodified on-screen, which I shall now move on to address.

In December of 2011, preceding Dragon Tattoo's release to cinemas, Swedish multinational clothing company H&M unveiled a 30-piece collection inspired by Lisbeth's

on-screen look in Fincher's film (Figure 1.10). Designer collaborations are commonplace with H&M, but collections based on fictional characters are less so. Working in collaboration with Summerville – costume designer for Dragon Tattoo – the popular retailer aimed to replicate Lisbeth's 'very real and lived-in' aesthetic (Summerville in Swash 2011), with such items as leather jackets, hoodies, trench pants, studded accessories, grungy caption t-shirts, and high-top boots. Commercialising Lisbeth's image in this way, by making aesthetic elements of her image available as fashion to consumers on the high street, potentially shapes how audiences identify with her character. By purchasing t-shirts and accessories replicating Lisbeth's on-screen costume, audiences may embody her character, meaning that this relationship can be tactile as well as merely visual. What this commodification could be said to encourage, however, is identification with a character who was never meant to be identified with in such terms.

Figure 1.10 Trish Summerville (foreground centre) and the H&M's 'Girl with the Dragon Tattoo collection'.

Ironically, H&M are mentioned in Larsson's novel by Lisbeth in order to illustrate a state of change within her relationship with a group of band members-turned friends, 'Evil Fingers': 'During the five years she spent time with Evil Fingers, the girls began to change. Their hair colour became less extreme, and their clothing came more often from H&M rather than from funky Myrorna' (Larsson 2008: 220). For Larsson's Lisbeth, then, H&M is regarded as a more mainstream brand, representing a shift towards adulthood for her friends who work, study, and care for their children. Again, Larsson intends for his hero to be different; in the same way that she is separated (albeit problematically) from other women in Armansky's gendered fantasies, Lisbeth feels removed from the only group of people she socialises with, who are now moving on with their lives and leaving her behind. Of course, processes of adaptation are subject to creative choices and media-specific conditions: 'The dramaturgy and the presentations of the characters have to be effective and simple so that plot and conflict emerge clearly especially in films directed at a global mass audience [where] contrasts are often exaggerated and traditionalised' (Povlsen and Waade 2009). What this point does illustrate, however, is the difference in ideological meanings inscribed in both the Swedish and Hollywood contexts of production. It is this contradiction that has proved ethically problematic beyond the boundaries of mere representation.

H&M's 'Girl with the Dragon Tattoo collection' is a bold extension of the film's already extensive branding strategy orchestrated and distributed by the multinational conglomerate, Sony Pictures. As I have explored here, the transnational movement of Larsson's work from book to screen has meant a shift in Lisbeth's cultural identity, achieved through indicative marketing strategies and certain aesthetic choices. This collaboration between two multi-national companies in the form of a fashion line, then, can be seen as an attempt to capitalise and globalise this particular branding of Lisbeth. Stenport and Alm argue that Larsson's novel, 'as a near-global artefact […] is fully enmeshed in the very social, gendered, and economic paradigms it appears to want to critique' (2009: 160). The same could be said for Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo*, in that it strives to create something more than just the sum of its parts. These synergistic strategies are

prevalent alongside the release of numerous contemporary Hollywood films, some of which have been scrutinised for the ways in which such marketing campaigns arguably distort the intended messages of the notable works of fiction from which their narratives derive. As Rosie Swash, writing for *The Guardian*, notes: it is [h]ard to think a high street collection stems back to a book originally called Men Who Hate Women' (2011).

Elsewhere, as will be the focus of Chapter 2 of this thesis, *The Hunger Games* franchise – adapted by the successful literary trilogy by Suzanne Collins – has provoked similar controversy for its branding practices. The marketing and promotional campaign for the release of *Catching Fire* in 2013 was promoted through various commercial tie-ins. Perhaps the most problematic of such tie-ins, is the 'Capitol Couture' fashion line, notably also created by Summerville. The 16-piece collection includes contributions from haute couture fashion houses, which work to blur the lines between fashion and fiction. The collection is intended to reflect the outrageous and luxurious clothing of the fictional world of Panem, laid out in lavish website spreads that boast 'The Future of Fashion'.[10] As Emily Asher-Perrin has noted, the problem with the commodification of such clothing is that it not only blurs the lines between this film world and our own but 'wearing clothes with designs specifically derived from that society's ethics and hollow glamor' arguably means that we are buying into the same thing that Collins's novels try and warn us against (2013). The costumes that Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) wear in the films are shown special attention, as in the novels – their clothing is a means to impress but ultimately exploits them. As Asher-Perrin concludes: 'clothes communicate' and it is of no surprise that fashion is such an integral part of Collins's work, for 'what you wear tells a story, it conveys how you want to be perceived, how you feel and what you think' (2013).

As already discussed, the ways in which Larsson uses Lisbeth's representation – namely her physicality – to engage readers about systematic issues of misogyny and gender inequality, provokes a certain ambivalence. While self-fashioning and claiming the body for visual self-expression in the form of tattoos arguably, through its exhibitionism and performativity, may invite voyeurism and a to-be-looked-at-ness, such modification

[10] This range of clothing can be found at www.capitolcouture.pn.

can also be read in terms of a counterdiscourse to politics (Møllegaard 2016: 353-55). Møllegaard elaborates on this tension thus:

> While Salander as woman clearly appeals to the voyeuristic desires of the male gaze, her body art conveys a […] warning through the threatening images of the wasp and dragon tattoos a loud message of her identity and capability, thus actively producing a truth about her that relies exclusively on visual (un)pleasure and assumes a dialectical relationship between the character's inner life and outer appearance. However, this "truth" is only apparent, for as Larsson shows by situating Salander within the greater social context of misogyny and institutional oppression of women, violence against women is embedded in ideology. (Møllegaard 2016: 351)

Lisbeth's clothing, then, can be seen as an extension of this signification of her 'inner life'. Most significantly in terms of the arguments put forth in this chapter, Fincher's visual re-presentation is informed by the same coding. The following directions from Steven Zaillian's script for *Dragon Tattoo*, for example, make clear that Lisbeth's self-fashioning is symbolic of a warning: 'This isn't punk fashion. This is someone saying, "Stay the fuck away from me"' (in Pierce 2011: 76). Correspondingly, Fincher's comments attribute Lisbeth's appearance as indicative of her trauma and the way she has been treated by others: 'She's been compromised. She's been subjugated […] She's been swept into the gutter […] She dresses like trash because she's somebody who has been betrayed and hurt so badly, by forces beyond her control, that she's just decided to be refuse' (in Pierce 2011: 76).

While Fincher seemingly acknowledges the social context of gendered oppression that Lisbeth's characterisation is so closely bound with, at the same time, his suggestion that '[s]he dresses like trash' is incredibly loaded. Such language warrants the question of who should determine what signifies 'trash' and can arguably be seen as indicative of the same kind of 'oppressive masculine discourse' regulating the female body – which Lisbeth attempts to resist (Møllegaard 2016: 356). While Larsson explores the subordination of women by seemingly exploiting the same stereotypes that may encourage hegemonic gendered looking relations, Fincher's deliberate commodification of Lisbeth's self-fashioning is equally problematic in terms of how it seemingly strips away the dangerous ideological underpinnings of Lisbeth's character. As such, the H&M clothing line provoked considerable controversy.

In her viral blog, 'An Open Letter to H&M from a Rape Survivor', writer and journalist, Natalie Karneef criticises the Swedish clothing company for what she describes as 'putting a glossy, trendy finish on the face of sexual violence and the rage and fear it leaves behind' (2011). She goes on to discuss how rape has influenced the choices that she has made about her clothing, asking if the designers of such clothing had considered the impact that rape has on how survivors think about what they wear. A criticism of Karneef's argument, however, highlighted numerous times in various comments on her blog, calls attention to her assumption that Lisbeth's choice of clothing is to be considered as a direct result of the sexual violence that she has experienced. Many comments, like the following example, do not attribute Lisbeth's choice of wardrobe to be in any way connected to her past experiences but liken her appearance to high street fashion:

> My girlfriend and I have worn a similar style (monotone, distressed neck, worn, drop-pants, hoodies, etc) for years and neither of us are rape victims nor do we feel our choice of clothing says "stay the fuck away" […] really, it just looks like she [Lisbeth] shops at All Saints Spitalfields, and probably listens to dubstep. (in Karneef 2011)

Here, assumptions are made about Lisbeth's appearance based on certain cultural experiences – Lisbeth's aesthetic style is recognised to be similar to that of British fashion retailer, All Saints. Indeed, whether or not Larsson intended for his protagonist's pallid clothing to carry connotations of her abusive and traumatic past is subject to interpretation. As previously noted, however, it is precisely Fincher's affirmative reading of these connotations that inform his own perceptions of Lisbeth's self-presentation; thus reinforcing the loaded politics associated with commodifying these aesthetic elements.

While his somewhat ambiguous representation of Lisbeth and her body can arguably be seen to complicate the socio-political agenda of Larsson's novels, his narratives do set out to address the systemic disempowerment of women (Møllegaard 2016: 350, Ferber 2012: 6). Through Lisbeth's character, for example, such issues surrounding the prevalence of sexual violence against women and the systematic brutality that takes place within services that are put in place to protect women, are explored in considerable detail: 'In her world, this was the natural order of things. As a girl she was legal prey, especially if she was dressed in a worn black leather jacket and had pierced eyebrows, tattoos and

zero social status' (Larsson 2008: 212). Here, Larsson highlights the prevalence of the rape culture that Karneef's (2011) policing response has cited: Larsson's hero has little trust in men, particularly those in positions of power and believes that her gender, coupled with her subversive appearance, make her vulnerable to sexist assumptions. This is also apparent in Lisbeth's choice not to report Bjurman after he had molested her, suggesting that: 'Any officer would take one look at her and conclude that with her miniature boobs, that was highly unlikely' (Larsson 2008: 212). Whether or not Larsson wanted such conclusions to be reached about Lisbeth's clothing choices, I would argue that an engagement with such feminist politics is clear; Lisbeth seems to personify such debates. The ethical implications of capitalising from Lisbeth's image, therefore, should be considered more carefully in terms of this pivotal theme.

Men Who Hate Women: Media and Rape Culture

The controversy that Fincher's film has provoked – criticised for its apparent sexualising of Lisbeth and its synergistic marketing strategies (Karneef 2011, Bartyzel 2011, Gates 2013) – speaks to wider debates about rape culture and its relation to social and mainstream media. The very first promotional poster for *Dragon Tattoo*, for example, featuring Blomkvist with his arm around a half naked Lisbeth, outraged many for the way that Mara's nudity seemed to so blatantly fulfil stereotypical gendered ways of looking at women, via a figure whose literary incarnation is integral to an exploration of misogyny. As Bartyzel argues in regard to the poster: 'Now Lisbeth was a sexual tease, and it was okay because she looked good doing it' (2011). Elsewhere Mara herself defends what she deems as the 'very separate' distinction that the film makes between consensual sex and sexual violence: 'Just because you have one, doesn't necessarily mean you can't have the other […] just because someone has been sexually abused doesn't mean they can't be depicted as someone who is sexual' (in Pierce 2011: 79). Indeed, Mara's words point to the convolutedness of longstanding feminist debates regarding the division between sexual objectification and sexual liberation, which were particularly significant to the emergence of postfeminism in the mid-1980s (see Butler 2013: 38).

The *Millennium* trilogy and its subsequent visual adaptations are part of a particular historical context in which images of sexual violence, namely rape, are proliferating. As Sarah Projansky notes: 'The pervasiveness of representations of rape naturalizes rape's place in our everyday world, not only as real physical events but also as part of our fantasies, fears, desires, and consumptive practices' (2001: 3). As her work explores, postfeminist discourses have played a significant part in defining and shaping social understandings of both feminism and rape, which are not wholly productive and not wholly reductive (Projansky 2001: 12). Similarly, looking to this current historical moment, Debra Ferreday notes the 'slippery' nature of both 'real' and representational rape narratives, at a time in which 'media representations are deeply enmeshed with cultural practices through which we make sense of everyday lives and lived experience, including the experience of living in societies where the ever-present threat of sexual violence is lived alongside a proliferation of media images of violated female bodies' (2015b: 23). Both the original literary incarnation of *Dragon Tattoo* and its subsequent filmic adaptations typify the messy politics of such a conundrum.

As the title of the original Swedish novel alludes to, *Men Who Hate* Women is an exploration of misogynist violence. Indeed, each novel from the original trilogy portrays shocking instances of violence against women, presented to the reader through the probing investigations of Blomkvist and, more closely, through the experiences of Lisbeth. Indeed, Larsson's novels incorporate an accumulatively complex view of violence towards women, linking domestic abuse with organised crime and institutionalised gendered crimes: 'the first book [is] about individual men who hurt women, the second [is] about the trafficking industry hurting women, and the third [is] about the way society ignores affronts to women' (Møllegaard 2016: 349). The investigation into Harriet Vanger's disappearance provides narrative focus for *Dragon Tattoo* as does the exposition of a sex-trafficking ring in *The Girl Who Played with Fire.* Lisbeth's back-story, detailing how she witnessed the abuse of her mother at the hands of her father, and his subsequent death at the hands of his daughter, is brought to the forefront of the narrative in *Played with Fire,* and concluded in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest*. It is apparent from her past – as well as from

the instances of violence and abuse that she suffers as part of the trilogy's continuing narrative – that issues surrounding the violent crimes committed against women saturate the fabric of Lisbeth's character.

As Abby L. Ferber notes, however, it is the visibility of this violence – presented through graphically detailed descriptions – that is both a strength of this trilogy and also a source of her ambivalence towards it (2012: 5). This is not to say that feminist critique of such issues is extraneous to enjoyment of these texts, for 'as long as we live in a rape culture, much of the joy to be found in popular media will remain tempered by ambivalence' (Ferber 2012: 12). These words may also be applied to Fincher's filmic representation of *Dragon Tattoo*. As I have argued in this chapter, Fincher presents a knowingness of cinematic spectacle and convention, which purposefully revels in the fascination that the character of Lisbeth compels. But this often comes at the expense of her agency in the film and a simplification of the complexities explored in the book. Dana Stevens, writing for *Slate*, sums this up thus: '*The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* does look and sound stunning […] But for all of its gloomy chic and carefully considered aesthetic choices, this clinical film seems curiously uninterested in women or, indeed, in people' (2011). Such an observation can be interrogated more rigorously when compared with Oplev's depiction of Lisbeth's rape by Bjurman.

Oplev's film presents a more melodramatic depiction of the scene. Rather than drawing attention to stylistic details with changing camera angles, staging remains very simplistic and focuses very closely on Lisbeth's horrific experience. While largely resisting dynamic camera movements elsewhere in the film, favouring close ups and static staging (Archer 2012: 8), the use of hand-held camera works to emphasise Lisbeth's panic and Bjurman's (Peter Andersson) hurried movements as he tries to control her. Oplev's use of close-ups capturing Lisbeth's face forces the audience into very close, almost claustrophobic proximity to her situation. The final shot of the scene, in particular, shows Lisbeth screaming out in pain while the background is blurred, and the non-diegetic sound is muted. Oplev offers no relief from this confined space until Lisbeth is shown walking

home in considerable pain along a bridge. The editing in this scene aligns the audience closely with Lisbeth's experience.

Although giving no more screen time to this scene than Oplev, Fincher's more dynamic camerawork delivers different perspectives on the action. In other words, Fincher seemingly exercises a less restrained approach in terms of who and what is shown. Rather than restricting what is shown using certain camera angles and positioning, Fincher presents the action as if holding nothing back from the situation, focused on including more detail as opposed to reducing it. Firstly, more of Lisbeth's naked form can be seen. While Oplev keeps explicit details out of frame or uses blurring when only the lower half of Lisbeth's body is exposed, Fincher's version sees Lisbeth stripped completely naked; the back of her body often visible in the bottom of the frame as she is forced to lie face down on the bed. Secondly, Fincher's film includes more of Bjurman (Yorick van Wageningen) in this scene; we see his expressions of anticipation and pleasure alongside Lisbeth's pain. As Gates identifies, 'the matching shots are not those of the victim's point of view but of the victor's' (2013: 209).

In line with the rest of the film, then, Fincher's depiction is more ambiguous in its positioning. While Oplev maintains identification with Lisbeth following an abrupt cut from the rape scene, Fincher shows Blomkvist working on the Vanger case. Returning once again to Bjurman's apartment, Lisbeth is shown awaiting her cheque, physically and emotionally defeated. This switch in action could be read as a way of reinforcing the fact that misogyny is present in every part of this narrative; what is happening to Lisbeth is only one instance among many others, both past and present. Conversely, this cut away from Lisbeth arguably disturbs our identification with her and could be seen to lose some of the power created in the previous scene (Gates 2013: 209). Like his wider work, Fincher tends to resist sequential closure and heightened moments, cutting away from these in such a way as to undermine the 'potential emotionalism' of a moment (Archer 2012: 10). Indeed, the aftermath of Lisbeth's rape unfolds as a 'process sequence' typical of Fincher films (Vishnevestsky 2011): she arrives home, swallows painkillers, and takes a shower. Fincher focuses not on the emotional impact of this ordeal but, instead, highlights factual

details such as the amount of money on the cheque and the bruises all over Lisbeth's body. A shot of Lisbeth from above, crouched down under the pouring water where her face is largely obscured, is perhaps part of what gives Fincher's film a 'clinical' feel (Stevens 2011). For Gates, this particular thematic tack helps to see Lisbeth justified and celebrated in her avenging actions, like a 'two-dimensional superhero' (2013: 209). In this sense, then, the nuances of Lisbeth's psychological depth are swallowed up by virtue of Fincher's authorial approach.

Returning to the morality behind these representations, Oplev's depiction is seemingly the more responsible. Fincher's camerawork and stylistic mechanics, tracking forwards and backwards through the long corridor of Bjurman's apartment, for instance, knowingly plays with the sense of dread and anticipation attributed to such scenes of displeasure. As previously discussed, Fincher employs a similar approach when staging Lisbeth's entrance to Milton Security, using abstract and restricting camera angles to play towards the viewer's presumed eagerness to see what she actually looks like. Rather than resisting spectacle, Fincher's approach willingly explores its inherent problems. Sexual violence as spectacle, however, is a fraught subject. As Tanya Horeck notes: 'The representation of rape continues to be one of the most highly charged issues in contemporary cinema' (2004: 115). The discourses surrounding on-screen depictions of sex and violence have led to certain implicit ideas regarding what is 'right' and what is 'wrong' in terms of such representation. As Martin Barker highlights, representations of sexual violence are heavily scrutinised against implicit, very strict 'protocols for presentation', which focus on '*taking sides'*, and the fragile line between the represented and the real when thinking about sexual desire (2011: 107 [original emphasis]).[11] Films where these boundaries appear to be less defined, therefore, are considered to be problematic. These particular approaches open themselves up to accusations of spectacularising such an event; identification with the victim, it can be argued, is disturbed

[11] This quotation is taken from Barker's article entitled 'Watching Rape, Enjoying Watching Rape'. This article discusses a research project from 2005 in association with the BBFC which intended to investigate how real audiences make sense of and respond to watching sexual violence on screen' in extreme cinema (Barker 2011: 107). The quotation was taken from a list of 5 dangers that Barker identifies as inherent in discussions of on screen sex and violence.

by shots of (male) pleasure, bringing to the fore issues surrounding the morality of film spectatorship.

While an extended discussion on the morality of screening sex and violence is beyond the scope of this chapter, it does seem pertinent to this analysis to briefly situate Fincher's representation in the wider context of rape culture. Indeed, how rape is discursively constructed is an urgent question for feminist cultural studies, especially as media and the Internet have become 'site[s] of struggle over sexual violence, both in reproducing rape culture and in resisting it' (Ferreday 2015b: 22). As Ferreday goes on to argue:

> The very term 'rape culture' indicates the need to understand rape *as* culture; as a complex social phenomenon that is not limited to discrete criminal acts perpetrated by a few violent individuals but is the product of gendered, raced and classed social relations that are central to patriarchal and heterosexist culture. (Ferreday 2015b: 22 [original emphasis])

The ubiquity of representations of rape in present culture follows on from what has been a long history of rape as 'a key aspect of storytelling throughout Western history' (Projansky 2001: 3). As Ferreday notes, however, the significance of the current moment is that the 'mediatisation of culture has expanded the possibilities for telling stories about rape, constructing new spaces in which violent rape myths circulate, but also offering new possibilities for challenging rape culture' (2015b: 23). The ways in which these stories are told in media and, more importantly, 'who gets to speak' (Ferreday 2015b: 25), are often bound up with the messy contradictions of postfeminist times.

As I have illustrated in relation to both Larsson's and Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo*, the socio-political realities supposedly underpinning Lisbeth's character – with respect to the systemic problem of misogyny – lose their efficacy by perpetuating certain postfeminist tropes. The literary origins of Lisbeth's character, themselves speak to particular ideologies which illustrate the gendered inequalities in the postfeminist moment. As Stenport and Alm note, Lisbeth fulfils the role of 'individual woman as a figure to set society right' who 'needs no legal representation and no help from the state to shape her life' (2012: 129-30). She is able to enact revenge against the men (her father, Bjurman, and Martin Vanger) who have sexually abused her and other women. She also appears

incredibly resourceful: assembling networks of professionals, other hackers, as well as securing incredible sums of money (from Bjurman and Wennerström respectively). Indeed, Lisbeth's actions mirror those of the novel's corporate villain (Stenport and Alm 2012: 130). In this sense, then, Lisbeth projects the benefits of an individualised and neoliberal society (Stenport and Alm 2012: 130). Moreover, this kind of representation – one which posits rape and misogyny as dealt with solely at the hands of an empowered woman – feeds into pervasive postfeminist narratives about feminism's apparent "success" and individual empowerment gained via "choice" and consumption. As Projansky argues, this kind of postfeminist discourse shapes what feminism is in ways which deny the relevance of race, sexuality, and class to considerations of gender (2001: 68). Arguably, Fincher's re-presentation of Lisbeth does more to liberate her from victimisation, but this is enacted via seemingly idealistic postfeminist promises of choice and empowerment.

Significantly, *Dragon Tattoo* is not the only one of Fincher's films to provoke controversy regarding its representation of gendered themes. *Gone Girl* (2014) (based on the 2012 best-selling novel of the same name by Gillian Flynn), features Amy Dunne (Rosamund Pike); another complicated, angry character, who fakes her own disappearance in order to frame her husband for murder (Ben Affleck). Part of *Gone Girl's* narrative involves Amy seeking refuge with an old friend, whom she later kills and accuses of rape, which she reveals upon her planned return to her husband amid a media frenzy. As Gayatri Nair and Dipti Tamang note, the 'immediacy' with which Amy's accusations are believed and responded to by the police and the public endorse a false image of such public institutions as sensitive to victims (2016: 616). Considered 'against the backdrop of a charged discourse on violence against women', which leads to stigma of women who actually bring forward charges of rape, arguably 'belittles a history of struggle by feminist movements in bringing rape to the fore and marking it as a political question' (Nair and Tamang 2016: 616-17). Indeed, this can be seen as another example of popular culture (both through the novel and its filmic adaptation) perpetuating rape myths, as well as presenting a regressive narrative which threatens to roll back what progress has been

achieved by feminist work (Nair and Tamang 2016: 615-16). In their respective representations of sexual violence, as well as the critical responses to them, both *Dragon Tattoo* and *Gone Girl* illustrate how rape culture narratives circulate in popular culture.

It is also evident from certain public moments how grave and deeply entrenched the implications are of rape culture. As Ferreday argues, there has been 'a tragicomical display of stupidity' around the subject of rape and sexual violence against women in recent years (Ferreday 2015b: 22).[12] More positively, however, media has enabled more space for challenge and critique, with the sheer scale of the problem of rape culture tending to 'galvanise a feminist response' (Ferreday 2015b: 22-3). As already discussed, Karneef's (2011) blog responding to the *Dragon Tattoo* H&M clothing line, gained considerable momentum and traction in terms of the public dialogue that it precipitated online. Indeed, the work that was done by Karneef and those who contributed to her blog – criticising the way that such a commercial tie-in seemingly trivialises what Lisbeth stands for – proves affirmative of the feminist interventions that are being made in online spaces.

The 'feminist uptake of digital communications' used to engage dialogue, to network and to organise against contemporary sexism, misogyny and rape culture is now on the rise (Mendes et al. 2018: 236). Global movements like the #MeToo campaign exemplify how digital tools like social media are being harnessed to counter dominant forms of oppression – in public.[13] As I will later turn to in Chapter 3 in relation to Lena Dunham's public performance, digital feminist activism is deeply complex, representing both 'the promise and the pitfalls' (Mendes et al. 2018: 236) involved in challenging dominant norms from within the same sites that perpetuate them. Fincher's *Dragon Tattoo*, like other popular texts representing feminist themes, seemingly conveys a similar burden.

[12] Ferreday identifies two particular examples of this: 'From a self-identified feminist public figure like Whoopi Goldberg making a clumsy distinction between 'rape' and 'real rape' to Republican senatorial candidate Todd Akins declaring that a woman cannot become pregnant if she does not consent to sex since 'the body has ways of shutting the whole thing down'' (2015b: 22).

[13] The #MeToo hashtag began trending on Twitter in October, 2017 after actor, Alyssa Milano, used it in her response to allegations of sexual assault by Hollywood producer, Harvey Weinstein. Milano encouraged members of the public to speak out via Twitter and use the hashtag in order to showcase the magnitude of the problem of sexual violence against women. What followed was a worldwide conversation – still on-going – which has captured both public and media attention.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to critically interrogate the representation of Lisbeth Salander in David Fincher's adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. As I have discussed, the transnational movement of Stieg Larsson's original work from book to screen, and from Sweden to the US, has brought about a shift in Lisbeth's cultural identity with ethical and cultural implications. In Sweden she became a cultural symbol but in Hollywood her iconography has been commodified. The commercialisation of Lisbeth's image in Fincher's film – through retail tie-ins, replica slogan t-shirts and other accessories – has helped to make her character globally accessible, and indeed, consumable. As this case study has shown, feminist ideals are complex in commercial contexts, especially when rendered through tropes and stereotypes indicative of a wider postfeminist culture.

The commodification of Lisbeth's film image is particularly apposite to current feminist criticism, as explored in the introduction, regarding mainstream fantasies of women that focus largely on promoting consumer culture. Images of girls and women in popular media are largely centred on lifestyle and appearance, while celebrating an apparent freedom and individual choice that masks the social and political inequalities still affecting women. As Tasker notes regarding the common misinterpretation of postfeminism: 'Setting aside lived inequalities, postfeminist culture operates in the realm of images, and here it is concerned above all to celebrate female empowerment and strength. Postfeminism emphasizes women's achievements – physical, educational, professional – and places particular emphasis on individual choice' (2011: 68-9). These images of empowerment and strength are embedded within popular culture and such ideals are reinforced through our growing consumer culture.

The way in which feminism manifests in the mainstream is also changing as a result of this consumer-driven culture. The term is now the subject of magazine columns, well-known celebrities are branding themselves as feminist, and multi-national corporations are using the term in their marketing campaigns. As Rashmee Kumar identifies, commodity feminism takes feminist ideologies, depoliticizes them and rebrands them as capitalist

ware' (2014). Indeed, the question of whether or not feminism and capitalism are compatible is relevant now more than ever before. For some, this relationship is not to be reconciled: 'This feminism works within capitalist and patriarchal frameworks to sell us a significantly less potent version of an ideology that is meant to challenge these very structures. In order for actual systematic change to occur, feminism cannot be brought to you by capitalism' (Kumar 2014). With respect to contemporary representations of women, like those which form the case studies in this thesis, the relationship between capitalism and feminism is defined by ambivalence.

Lisbeth's on-screen representation evidences concerns about the commodification of feminist characteristics. H&M's retail tie-in, for example, co-opts the aesthetics of Lisbeth's identity and otherness, which in itself can be seen as a manifestation of the gendered violence that has so profoundly affected her life. Fincher is transparent about the ways in which the different 'looks' of his Lisbeth will function as iconography, which the constant changing of costume and hair variations throughout the film blatantly reflect. The keeping up of spectacle in this way is nothing foreign to Hollywood, however, particularly in terms of the way a woman's costume functions within a filmic text. As this analysis has shown, this creative labour towards the construction of Lisbeth's representation is significant in terms of how such work draws attention to the significance of these aesthetic details, both textually and extra-textually. Close-up shots of Lisbeth's Coca-Cola cans, Apple Macbooks, and McDonald's Happy Meals, are also prevalent throughout the narrative, working to mould these branded items as part of the character's iconography. But Fincher's style of filmmaking often entertains commodity fetishism through product placement.

The question of whether or not Lisbeth simply becomes one of Fincher's characters – or, in other words, whether the significance of her gender complexity is undercut by the director's distinctive form and style – is also a convoluted one for the ambiguities it presents. As I have discussed, Fincher removes the psychology of victimhood from Lisbeth's representation, focusing largely on showing her to be adept and unapologetic in her act of revenge. It is precisely this, however, that complicates his arguably more

subversive representation. Fincher downplays Lisbeth's victimhood, engaging certain cinematic tropes which arguably transforms Lisbeth 'into a two-dimensional superhero' (Gates 2013: 209). At the same time, Fincher's more open, often reflexive style of cinematography, particularly in the rape and rape-revenge scenes, frees Lisbeth from the pathology of victimhood.

As I have unpacked with respect to *Dragon Tattoo's* literary origins, however, the potency of the gendered issues which Larsson brings to the fore already provoke ambivalence from a feminist perspective. While his novel seemingly stands in steadfast opposition to postfeminist misinterpretations – that the declaration of feminism is no longer relevant – Larsson's engagement with the gendered politics of looking involves exploiting the very tropes that contribute to Lisbeth's subordination. Her character supposedly personifies the oppression and mistreatment of women at the hands of misogynists, but Larsson's representation of Lisbeth never seems to transcend the problematic gendering of looking. Indeed, anyone who is different is looked at. Fincher lends more ambiguity to Lisbeth's re-presentation, but this is easily co-opted aesthetically. This is not something that is acknowledged as a caveat, however, for his film cleverly constructs Lisbeth as a figure to be looked at.

CHAPTER 2

‘Katniss, your Jennifer is showing’: Stardom, Authenticity, and Emotion in *The Hunger Games*

Figure 2.1. ‘Jennifer Lawrence, Katniss Everdeen, Atlanta, GA, 2014’ in *Tim Palen: Photographs from The Hunger Games* (2015).

As part of the hardback, weighty tome entitled *Tim Palen: Photographs from The Hunger Games* (2015), a double-page, black and white plate captures Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen during a 2014 promotional shoot in Atlanta, Georgia (Figure 2.1). Dressed in the custom-made black armour associated with her rebel identity as ‘The Mockingjay,’ Lawrence as Katniss stands rigidly just off-centre, with her bow in hand, looking directly ahead. She is positioned on and in front of a plain vinyl background, slightly elevated from the floor, surrounded by extensive flash lighting equipment. Also in the foreground of the image, standing at either side of the actor are three members of the crew overseeing the shoot. The significance of this particular portrait alongside the numerous others in this collection emanate from its apposite illustration of the blurring of boundaries between the textual and the extra-textual. The portrait, frozen in time, captures

the entanglement between these boundaries – between the world of the films and our own – exemplifying the complexity of these texts as they now exist within multiple spheres of consumption beyond those of their literary origins. In what would become part of the official marketing material for the penultimate film from the franchise, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1* (2014), the photograph mirrors the overtly reflexive position that the original novels encourage; which the visual adaptations go on to appropriate, intensify, and transform. This chapter will mine the significance of these processes of adaptation, with a focus on some of the key points of contact within this entanglement between real and mediated, textual and extratextual boundaries.

Beginning with the literary inception of the novels, then, inspiration for *The Hunger Games* (2008-10)[1] seemingly stemmed from similar tensions. When questioned about the influences behind her work, author Suzanne Collins noted, while she was channel surfing late at night, 'the very unsettling way' in which the lines began to blur between actual footage of the Iraq war and that of a reality television competition (in Balkind 2014: 9). Echoing Jean Baudrillard's 'a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal' (1981: 1), the realities of war blend with the virtual simulations of entertainment. Forming the premise for The Games themselves,[2] and central to Collins' narrative focus, is a critical exploration of the voyeuristic pleasures associated with popular forms of media, particularly those invited by reality TV and celebrity culture. Collins presents an extreme version of reality TV. One that not only emulates the amalgamation of generic elements recognisable in international franchises like *Big Brother* (2000-), such as 'the game show, the lifestyle programme, the make-over, the talk show, and […] docu-soap' (Turner 2004: 58), but also one that identifies with the negative rhetoric regarding the salacious, deleterious effects, and societal implications that form a familiar strand of commentary in relation to such popular media forms (see Hight 2001, and Roscoe 2001). For Collins, reality TV invites a

[1] The trilogy consists of *The Hunger Games* (2008), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2009), and *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* (2010).

[2] The Hunger Games are an annual spectacle that sees a male and female between the ages of 12 and 18 'reaped' from each of the twelve Districts that make up a post-apocalyptic North America named Panem. The twenty-four 'tributes,' as they are so called, must then fight to the death in a televised gladiatorial tournament. The Games are a central facet of the oppression forged by the totalitarian Capitol government, who exploit the masses in the Districts by enforcing grueling labour regimens, resulting in severe economic and social inequalities, and extreme poverty.

'voyeuristic thrill, [by] watching people being humiliated or brought to tears or suffering physically' resulting in the 'potential for desensitizing the audience' to the impact of 'real tragedy' so that it 'all just blurs into one' (in Hudson 2017). Such concerns are brought to bear in the novels through Katniss's first-person narrative. Each novel presents a detailed commentary of the physical, psychical, and psychological effects that are a result of her participation in The Games and in the war against the Capitol government.

Moreover, Katniss constantly questions what is real. Becoming a recognisable trope within these literary texts, 'real or not real?' is an expression that both symbolises the crux of the emotional connection between Katniss and her teammate, Peeta Mellark, and acts as a means of anchoring their own sense of self as they attempt to navigate this systemic, constructed world. In the final novel, *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay* (2010), both characters must fight their way back to each other following the capture of Peeta by the Capitol at the end of the previous novel, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (2009), using this question as a means of seeking out who and what they can trust. At the beginning of *Mockingjay*, Katniss sits in an isolated part of the underground District 13, her hands covering her ears in an attempt to cope with the effects of her traumatic experiences in The Games. She begins with the things she knows to be true, to be 'real,' followed by the things that are more complex and uncertain: 'My name is Katniss Everdeen. I am seventeen years old. My home is District 12. I was in The Hunger Games. I escaped. The Capitol hates me. Peeta was taken prisoner. He is thought to be dead' (Collins 2010: 5). Here, and in various parts of this novel, Katniss desperately seeks for a point of reference to reality, one that exists outside of The Games, and one that exists outside of the arena of mediated images.

The question of what is considered to be real and what is considered to be a product of a media construction or manipulation, or indeed, whether such a distinction can even be made, is central to these novels. Collins attempts to mine such debates through Katniss's self-reflexive commentary, which continually describes what is seen and how it is seen. In the first novel, *The Hunger Games* (2008), for example, Katniss rides through adoring crowds on the back of a horse-driven chariot in the ceremonial Tribute Parade,

marking the opening of the 74th annual Games. Artificial flames billow from a black cape trailing behind her and she looks up to see herself and Peeta magnified on a large television screen: 'I catch sight of us […] and am floored by how breathtaking we look. In the deepening twilight, the firelight illuminates our faces […] No one will forget me. Not my look, not my name. Katniss. The girl who was on fire' (Collins 2008: 80-1). Even her own sense of identity, then, is discerned largely via the ways she is seen through media. Referring to herself using the same epithet that would later become part of her iconic media image, Katniss struggles to differentiate herself from this construction.

Like the other girl figures that form the focus of my analyses, the representation of Katniss asks questions about the cultural significance of girls: how are they mediated and to what effects? While Chapter 1 addressed the gendered politics of 'looking at' Lisbeth Salander, however – namely how her representation is problematically defined by how she is coded and regarded through the eyes of men – Collins's novels examine a gaze that is intensely public. In this chapter, Katniss's 'seen-ness' – how she is perceived by others through media – explicitly acknowledges the wider cultural conditions of a life exposed to the public via media. Collins invites readers to "see" how Katniss is "seen," through constant references to her own appearance, as well as to the audience that perceives her; whether she is being watched in a live studio during an interview, or as part of the continuous televised footage of The Games, the presence of the audience is inextricably linked to Katniss's sense of self. Katniss's 'seen-ness', then, is not exclusively gendered but a narrative concept which acknowledges more of an awareness, or consciousness, with regard to the ways of seeing of the modern media.

Recognising the centrality of the visual in modern society and the importance of (reality) television in facilitating this, Collins's novels engage with an historical shift between the represented and the real. As Graeme Turner identifies, citing Jon Dovey:

> Once the camera was hidden and determined not to interfere with the reality depicted, implying the priority of 'the real' over the representation. Now, however, the camera captures events 'that are *only* happening because the camera is there', implying the priority of the representation over 'the real'. In reality TV, in particular…says Dovey, 'a 'reality' is constructed solely in order to produce a representation…without the fame-conferring gaze, there would be no event worth filming, no reality' (2000: 11). (Turner 2004: 62)

The visibility of the camera then – its presence in facilitating and acknowledging this gaze – is pivotal to what seemingly constitutes 'the real'. As Turner continues, 'the circulation of images of the self via television has become a means of legitimation. No longer consigned to the 'hyperreal' of postmodernity, the media-tised image of the self has come to seem as if it is among the promises of everyday existence' (2004: 62). Situating Collins's work within these cultural parameters is necessary, then, as *The Hunger Games* grapples with such concepts relating to the prevalence of media in the current moment.

The role of the media is not only central when theorising the postmodern but is instrumental to its condition: 'This state of "hyperreality," a phenomenon attributable expressly to the mass media […] becomes the contextual mode for a postmodern society. Not only are the media conducive to postmodernism, but […] they cultivate it' (Shugart et al. 2001: 196). Characterised by 'mass-mediated experiences and new cultural forms of representation' (Harms and Dickens in Shugart et al. 2001: 196), postmodern culture is dependent upon the cyclical nature of the media. As Baudrillard's (1981) seminal work on simulacrum and hyperreality attests, the dominance of the mediated image is such that a distinction between fantasy and reality becomes meaningless in postmodern culture. The loss of the real, as Baudrillard defines it, ('It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real, and thus of saving the reality principle' (1994: p.12-3)), suggests an acceptance of the simulations as more real than that which they represent.

This arguably fosters a complacent position wherein the spectacle of mediated images distracts from anything other than the representations themselves. The totalitarian Capitol government – a powerful and privileged elite – not only conform to, but revel in, the ritualised media spectacle of The Hunger Games and the celebrification that it brings into effect. Capitol citizens remain indoctrinated by the wealth and the superficial excess afforded to them on the backs of Panem's poor, for such inequalities are masked via mediated spectacle and entertainment. If Collins's novels acknowledge and explore the effects of this arguably complacent position, albeit in a post-apocalyptic setting (as is

typical of dystopian fiction), the filmic adaptations intensify these effects by adopting and constantly drawing attention to their mediated form.

As this chapter shall foreground, however, *The Hunger Games* is pivotal in discerning how far these theorisations of the postmodern can be applied to such an understanding of present culture. As Turner identifies in relation to reality TV, the prevalence of the mediated image over the real is such that it is seemingly taken for granted, arguably making theoretical concepts such as the hyperreal appear outdated and almost redundant (2004: 62). The filmic adaptations, for example, assume Collins's negative, extreme, and futuristic interpretation of society while taking on the form and adopting certain processes that the author supposedly sets out to critique. If the novels 'demonstrate their effectiveness […] in a way that inevitably becomes a deeply personal critique of the readers' own relationship to both the Hunger Games and society in general', the films intensify and transform this position by creating a reflexive visual spectacle (Arrow 2012: vi-vii): upon viewing these films, audiences are invited to simulate the position of the Capitol's citizens as they watch this pervasive form of reality TV which, for the most part, sees children killing children, in the end, as a form of entertainment. The ways in which Collins's fictional world is visually re-presented on screen, therefore, overtly draws attention to this problematic, complicitous position while knowingly cultivating it.

Katniss's trepid negotiation of her famed identity within this dystopian world echoes in our own via Lawrence's globally recognised stardom. As a rather reluctant heroic figure who defies the Capitol and spearheads a revolution against the tyrannical social order, Katniss's symbolic power is arguably felt more profoundly in terms of its resonance with Lawrence's own renown. Both Katniss and Lawrence are girl icons, dealing with intense visibility in the limelight of a celebrity-infused culture, and although Lawrence is not competing to the death in a televised tournament, she must still navigate our own world wherein '[c]elebrity exists at the centre of media and cultural life' (Redmond 2014: 4). This pervasive media climate operates according to specific gendered rules and dimensions (Holmes and Negra 2011) and thus requires sustained identity work on the part of female celebrities (Nunn and Biressi 2010). In an interview with Brooks Barnes in *The New York*

Times, Lawrence describes the emotional labour involved in managing her public selfhood: 'I picture myself drowning. Outwardly, I look like I'm having a blast, and I am, at least on some levels. […] But inside I'm terrified. In an instant – boom – everyone's listening, everyone's looking' (in Barnes 2016b). Coming of age in the media spotlight, Lawrence's star image adds another layer to her on-screen portrayal of Katniss and further extends the relevancy of Collins's timely critique.

As James Keller notes in his analysis of the meta-cinematic conventions of the first filmic instalment, in the same way that Katniss must learn to act convincingly in front of the cameras, so too must Lawrence in order to give a successful on-screen performance: 'The film's self-conscious consideration of the art of acting allegorizes the paradox surrounding the profession. The player's performance is successful insofar as it permits the audience to suspend disbelief […] Thus professional achievement is measured by the player's sincerity in deceit' (2013: 29-30). As I shall explore further in this chapter, such self-referentiality is further marked by the discourses of authenticity surrounding Lawrence's star image, precipitated by her relatable, apparently natural, celebrity identity (Petersen 2014, Kanai 2015). In postfeminist media culture, authenticity runs counter to feminine naturalness: 'femininity is routinely conceptualized as torn between chaos and (over) control, serenity, and agitation' (Holmes and Negra 2011: 2). Lawrence's negotiation of this messy, fragile postfeminist landscape, then, parallels Katniss's struggle under the pervasive surveillance regimes enforced by the Capitol. But rather than merely conforming to postfeminist logics, as some accounts suggest (Kanai 2015), I argue that Lawrence's self-reflexive performance and affective labour help further to draw out the ambivalences and contradictions of these phenomenal texts.

In light of the ways in which these visual re-presentations of Collins's narratives have resonated with the gendered politics of postfeminism, as well as theoretical ideas of postmodernism, this chapter is broadly organised via these two topical strands. I begin with an analysis of the films themselves, mapping out the problematic politics associated with their status as a franchise; for in this form the films are 'fully immersed in the very system of celebrity culture and commodified spectacle the storyworld seemingly

denounces' (Hassler-Forest 2016: 137). In order to address these ideological questions in more depth, I draw on scholarship of reality TV to discuss how these films make use of the very tools that they critique. In particular, I focus on the gendered politics of Katniss's performance and the emotional, affective dimensions that are vividly rendered in the films via Lawrence's performance. Following an analysis of how the films present Katniss's turbulent negotiation between her own sense of self and her performance as a media celebrity, I then move on to the ways in which such negotiations are mirrored extratextually via a detailed analysis of Lawrence's celebrity identity work. Unpicking defining features of the star's authentic performance, I argue that Lawrence conforms to particular postfeminist logics while simultaneously drawing to and unpicking them. I end the chapter by drawing on particular examples of fan-work which, when read against Lawrence's screen performance, function as an extension of the contradictory potential of her work.

Appropriation, Intensification, Transformation

While it is the collapse of news and entertainment that Collins pinpointed as the inspiration for her novels (in Balkind 2014: 9), postmodern theory argues that media technologies are strategically utilised in order to cultivate this blurring (Gitlin 1986, Grossberg 1989, Shugart et al. 2001). Further, mediated images are ultimately rendered nonrepresentational, nonreferential, and dependent on formats and codes for their substance (Harms and Dickens in Shugart et al. 2001: 197). The filmic adaptations of *The Hunger Games* visualise this postmodern condition, appropriating key conventions of popular news and entertainment formats as a means of bringing these blurring of boundaries into dazzling effect and in cinematic scale. We see this at work in the early stages of the first film: Katniss and Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) quickly become acquainted with 'the Capitol's decadent (post)modernity' (Fisher 2012: 30) as their entire existence as participants in The Games is about the material surface of the image. The aforementioned Tribute Parade, where the tributes from each District are introduced to the Capitol officially

to commemorate the beginning of the annual ritualised spectacle, provides a good case in point, here.

The scene begins amidst the preparations for the ceremonial procession, as Katniss and Peeta are briefed by their stylist Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), about their innovative costume design: “I promise, this is not real fire. These suits are built so that you won’t feel a thing.” Peeta seems apprehensive about this, “Looks pretty real to me,” but Cinna remains calmly assertive in his role: “Well, that’s the idea. You ready?” This brief exchange sets out the conditions of this televised event and dystopian society – which invests purely in artifice and taking pleasure in the image. This scene also exemplifies how the films reinforce the idea that any reference to reality is mediated, with Katniss and Peeta constantly searching for truth and meaning beyond this (akin to postmodernist debates that purport the distinction between image and substance to be meaningless). The camerawork mimics that which is typical for reality television, with handheld movements and static shots of the tributes partially obstructed by figures in the blurred foreground, similar to those often used in factual, documentary footage (Dovey 2000, Bignell 2005). Panning shots trace the faces of the well-dressed Capitol citizens. They laugh and talk excitedly, whilst eating and drinking, eagerly awaiting the beginning of the parade. The camera shows a wide-angled long-shot of the crowd-lined street, panning along the lengthy stretch towards the City Circle, where President Snow (Donald Sutherland) and other prestigious members of the Capitol government are seated on an elevated, elaborately decorated stage. The brassy sound of the ceremonial music can still be heard as the camera cuts to the two presenters providing a televised commentary of the parade.

This is followed by a panning shot of the interior of the Gamemakers’ control room, where multiple screens show footage fed from different cameras, and the Head Gamemaker, Seneca Crane (Wes Bentley), as he directs the broadcast of the event. (Notably this element of The Games is more prominent in the films than in the novels, as

the narrative is not solely reliant on Katniss's perspective.)[3] Following a countdown from Crane in the control room, the chariots begin the procession and each of the districts are introduced. With the commentators stunned by District 12's fiery costumes, the camera zooms out from a close-up of Katniss's face as her eyes dart around, bewildered by her surroundings. The camera shows part of the crowd, with the handheld movements further emphasising their animated gestures. More close-ups show the pleasure on their faces, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, they are clapping and shouting incessantly. Briefly intercut with these shots, the camera zooms in on Katniss's face as she fixes her eyes on some of the Capitol citizens with a look of concern, and almost disgust. Centring on their chariot, the camera stays with Katniss and Peeta as they see their image on different screens staggered along the procession. The remainder of the scene sees the chariots come to a halt in front of the stage before President Snow makes a speech to mark the beginning of The Games.

Underlined here, and in similar ways throughout the series, are the class hierarchies that are enforced by the Capitol's totalitarian regime, with The Hunger Games functioning as the main means of ideological control. As Harms and Dickens note, 'the powerful material forces' that guide media production are employed to erode subjectivity so as to ''divide and conquer' […] communities and subcultures that might otherwise offer active resistance' (Harms and Dickens in Shugart et al. 2001: 197). Indeed, the only sources of public information for the impoverished population of Panem are those that are fed to them by the Capitol, therefore restricting their knowledge of the surrounding districts and the rest of society. Like reality TV programmes such as *Big Brother*, the citizens and tributes are constantly under video surveillance (see, for example, Corner 2002, Bignell 2005, Nunn and Biressi 2010), the levels of which Collins has exaggerated to the point where they prove dangerous and ultimately fatal in the context of The Hunger Games

[3] The Gamemakers are citizens of the Capitol who are responsible for the design and the control of The Hunger Games. Their job is to provide a televised display that will enthral the Capitol and keep them entertained for the duration of the tournament. Much like the backstage team working on any televised reality production, albeit on a more extreme level, the Gamemakers mould and manipulate particular elements and events in the arena, using futuristic technology to cause lethal weather conditions and unleash lab-grown animal mutations which will create a gruesome, thrilling display.

storyworld. Arguably such exaggeration draws inspiration from the 'ritualised humiliation' of the guests observed in daytime talk shows such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (2005-) (Tincknell 2011: 88-9). While The Games seemingly represent a standard critique of reality TV and postmodern media culture more broadly, as part of a franchise the films also make use of the very tools that they are critiquing. This is especially evident when turning to the promotional materials relating to the film series.

The below images (Figure 2.2) are taken from a series of 65 still photographic images featured on Tim Palen's website. The first (left) shows Lenny Kravitz in character as Cinna, modelling gold eyeliner in what appears to be an advertisement for a Capitol product. Although only *simulating* this promotion, similar portraits in this series such as the one on the (below) right, showing Elizabeth Banks as Effie Trinket, feature actual commercial products by nail polish brand China Glaze. These images are part of an illustrious marketing campaign that would grow in momentum with each new film release, appearing alongside other notable commercial tie-ins such as the 'Girl On Fire' iPhone game, a 'get the look' fashion spread in *People* magazine (see Roiphe 2012), 'Train Like a Tribute' circuit-training in association with New York Sports Club,[4] and a 'Fiery Footlong' promotion with sandwich restaurant, Subway. Launching in restaurants in the United States and Canada, Subway partnered with Lionsgate and non-profit organisation Feeding America, offering customers 'bold' themed sandwiches, deals, and competitions. As part of this, customers were encouraged to photograph themselves alongside *Hunger Games* character cardboard cut-outs and share them on social media platforms with the accompanying hashtag, #SUBtractHUNGER. For every image shared, Subway purportedly donated one meal to Feeding America, a charity that provides hunger-relief via networked food banks and other community-based agencies across the United States.[5] Although aligning with charitable causes, such campaigns are still bounded by the capitalist values of the corporations they are tied to. Herein lies the messiness of the

[4] For more information, see: http://www.self.com/story/fitness-train-like-tribute-nysc
[5] For more information, see: http://www.quarterquell.org/2013/11/catching-fire-and-feeding-america.html

films' politics: such is the nature of their commercialised form that the films have inevitably become a product of the system that the series itself exposes.

Figure 2.2. Lenny Kravitz (left) and Elizabeth Banks (right) in character for promotional material. http://www.timpalen.com.

Gaining considerable momentum with *Catching Fire*, the second film in the series, this transmedia world building saw 'the actual world of *The Hunger Games* [as] growing outside of itself' (Francis Lawrence in Palen 2015: 11). As Chief Brand Officer and President of Worldwide Marketing at Lionsgate, Palen's approach opens up the series to broader spheres of consumption and audience interaction by offering an extension of the diegesis wherein certain aspects of these re-presentations "play out" in reality as if in Collins's fictional storyworld. The films themselves already intensify the effectiveness of the novels' self-reflexive critique by positioning viewers as members of the Capitol audience in an immersive visualisation; voyeurs of an, albeit simulated, barbaric spectacle. Of course, the films are *not* The Hunger Games, but such extratextual marketing material extends this simulation and works to blur the boundaries between the film world and our own, highlighting the grotesque nature of consumption and celebrity branding while simultaneously promoting them. As the above images illustrate, they 'do not just invite your attention, but demand it' (Krista Smith in Palen 2015: 9) through

spectacle; both appear as if from another world but at the same time point to its conscious construction within our own world through the buying and selling of these products.

In this way, such an approach is both conducive to and cultivates a postmodern condition (Shugart et al. 2001: 196), but as I will show, the ways in which this is achieved also complicates such postmodern conceptual frameworks. As postmodern theory delineates, the mediated image and its dominance in contemporary culture is such that it renders a distinction between fantasy and reality to be meaningless. This is a condition that *The Hunger Games* recognises in all its manifestations, especially outside of the texts themselves. Palen's work lends further credence to Baudrillard's (1981) loss of the real – which Collins explores in her original narratives ('real or not real?') – in its commitment to maintaining this acceptance of the representation over reality. Palen's involvement in the promotion and marketing for all four films has helped to shape the franchise and its definitive image, arguably contributing to its global success in amassing over $740 million (Box Office Mojo 2017a). Utilising a combination of traditional and digital media, including social media platforms aimed at encouraging audience participation, the marketing strategies for each film were innovative in their design; in keeping with the futuristic, fantasy environment Collins created.

In an age of 'convergence culture' – a paradigm of media change 'defined through the layering, diversification, and interconnectivity of media', transmedia storytelling becomes one way in which to think about the flow of content across media (Jenkins 2011). In this way elements of *The Hunger Games* fiction were 'dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels' in order to create 'a unified and coordinated entertainment experience' (Jenkins 2011). Appealing to an already 'built-in' web-savvy fan base that the highly successful literary trilogy had already garnered (Barnes 2016a), one particular layer of Palen's long-term strategy included phased release of content on popular online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, and YouTube. Images were released via the 'onepanem' Instagram account,[6] intended to promote anticipation for the subsequent release of 'Capitol TV' YouTube videos 'brought to you in

[6] See, for example: https://www.instagram.com/p/ppx4eon7T2/

stunning 4K.'[7] In these videos, President Snow addresses the viewer as if they are citizens of Panem, while advertising links to Twitter hashtags and official websites for the Capitol[8] and the revolution.[9] The launch of the 'Capitol Couture' Tumblr site featured spreads devoted to each of the Quarter Quell champions from *Catching Fire*.[10] The website includes high-end fashion from costume designer for the franchise, Trish Summerville, as well as contributions from renowned couture fashion houses like Alexander McQueen and Dior. The site 'mimics the Capitol in style and tone' (Balkind 2014: 53), incorporating *real* fashion designs to intentionally blur the fictional world and our own to the point where it becomes jarring and 'frighteningly real' (Asher-Perrin 2013). Within this world-building process, then, such transmedia content serves to map out this world more clearly while deepening audience engagement; not only across multiple media, but across multiple texts (Jenkins 2011). While there is more to say about this sophisticated world-building, my focus is less about how the films market themselves and more about the conceptual significance of this approach to the articulation of their politics.

The franchise's transmedia storyworld seemingly offers no critical distance from the capitalist structure that the films critique, due simultaneously to feeding the systems that sustain this structure. As the first part of this chapter has shown, such an uncertain position is, in fact, the point here. The films themselves offer an ambivalent position that is knowingly cultivated by their visual spectacle. As Dan Hassler-Forest notes, the campaign's strategic use of established brands and commodities is done with such 'crystal clarity' that interpretive readings as both criticism or legitimation are rendered irrelevant 'by the franchise's primary function as *spectacle*' (2016: 144 [original emphasis]). In moments of entanglement where the distinctions between the textual and the extratextual, the mediated and the simulated, fantasy and reality become blurred, such boundaries are meaningless. Although this blurring of categories shares affinities with postmodernist discourses, these films push the boundaries of this messy theoretical

[7] Videos available at: goo.gl/ecZBup
[8] Website available at: http://www.thecapitol.pn
[9] Website available at: http://www.revolution.pn
[10] Website available at: http://capitolcouture.pn

terrain by posing questions about the value (and limitations) of these conceptual frameworks for analysing the contemporary media environment. These moments of blurring, I argue, hold greater conceptual significance than the obvious irony behind the films' socio-political allegory. This is not to dismiss the problematic and contradictory nature that the films' visual representations present but rather to suggest that there is something political at work here that warrants further discussion. On the one hand, the films use self-referential, postmodern techniques to draw attention to the inherent ideological implications of the media that they knowingly play with, thus exposing existing conceptual frameworks that have been used to analyse and critique these systems as seemingly useless. On the other hand, however, the affective engagements fostered by these texts allow them to move beyond such a simplistic, haltering critique of ideological frameworks.

Part of the strength behind these texts and the phenomenon that they have become, for instance, is their ability to stir up revolutionary fervour. *The Hunger Games* has fascinated media commentators and cultural theorists alike in light of its jarring symbolic power, which has caused a ripple effect in terms of its significance beyond its literary audience. Donald Sutherland himself has spoken of the films' 'insurrectionary potential', suggesting that their coded commentary on inequality, power and hope may awaken millennials from their slumber: 'It just puts things out in the light and lets you have a look at it […] it will make you think a little more pungently about the political environment you live in and not be complacent' (in Carroll 2013). Hassler-Forest suggests that Sutherland's role as the tyrannical ruler of Panem, President Snow, ironically works against some of the franchise's revolutionary potential (2016: 139), but one could argue that it is precisely the actor's off-screen record of left-wing activism that further propels the films' insurgency, albeit doubling as a perfect blockbuster marketing pitch that plays into the franchise's already obvious irony (Carroll 2013).

It is this double-edged quandary that remains ever present within the tensions that are represented in these texts and it is perhaps for this reason that *The Hunger Games* has been used as an illustration for causes on opposing sides of the political schismatic

divide. Stella Morabito writing in *The Federalist*, refers to this as 'strange-bedfellow politics' describing the ways that the films' revolutionary message has resonated with social, political movements with different libertarian and conservative values, like Occupy,[11] Tea Party, as well as Barack Obama's presidential campaign (2014). Morabito also recognises the glut of symbolism in *The Hunger Games* narratives, particularly in terms of Snow's whiteness ('white hair, white clothes, white roses, white power, all pure as the driven Snow'), alluding to Sutherland's involvement in radical activism as a supposed reason for his surprise at a conservative embrace of the films (2014). Although the actor's views themselves could arguably be read as a 'vague and patronizing call to arms' (Hassler-Forest 2016: 139), fuelling publicity for a sugar-coated blockbuster which blends 'romance, razzmatazz and high-stakes peril' to sell-out multiplexes, *The Hunger Games* creates a 'worthy symbolism of its own kind' (Child 2015). The appropriation of *The Hunger Games*' three-fingered Mockingjay salute by five students protesting against the 2014 military coup in Thailand, for example, illustrates the currency of this symbolism. Used as a sign of resistance and solidarity in its original literary incarnation and the subsequent films, the salute lent dramatic form to the silent protests against the seizure of power by the ruling Thai junta.

The very real consequences for such dissent – including the immediate detention of the students involved in the protests at a press conference, as well as the subsequent embargo placed on the novels and films themselves in Thailand – seemingly exemplify what Jebediah Purdy refers to as *The Hunger Games*' 'polymorphous perversity of solidarity and outrage', where the series' seductiveness can be seen to be harnessed by the harmony and wholeness between solidarity and grievance (2014). The salute, for Purdy, reflects the ideological ambiguousness of Collins's texts, arguing that in its emotional and aesthetic significance, solidarity as expressed in *The Hunger Games* is

[11] It is important to note that Occupy Wall Street's ties with Our Global Justice Movement, who adopt activist approaches that seek to transcend traditional left- and right-wing designations, gives the movement anarchist rather than socialist roots. Morabito overlooks such ties in her assessment of Occupy Wall Street as foreseeing the solution to economic equality and social injustice in 'big, left-wing government' (Morabito 2014).

mere form and feeling without substance or purpose in terms of actual political change (2014).

Rather than dismissing emotion and feeling as simply in opposition to, and devoid of politics, however, the rest of this chapter will focus on the layers of meaning that are to be found or, indeed, *felt*, through the films' affective and symbolic power. Moments of uncertainty and ambiguity, where the films' form and aesthetics seemingly cloud its moral message, are problematic but are a prerequisite for understanding their affective significance. For Mark Fisher, the real revolution of Collins's storyworld lies in its ability to decode dominant social reality in plain sight within the mythographic core of popular culture (Fisher 2013). Fisher speaks of the genuine deliriousness he felt as he watched the second film in the series, *Catching Fire*, discerning something more than 'empty self-referentiality' in what he terms as the film's 'punk immanence': 'a contagious self-reflexivity that bleeds out from the film and corrodes the commodity culture that frames it' (2013).

Positioning Katniss as the catalytic core and a symbolic way out of the 'paralysing sense of the system's [capitalism's] total closure', Fisher argues that it is through her emotionally driven actions that these texts move beyond what he refers to as 'the consentimental affective regime imposed by reality TV, lachrymose advertising and soap operas' (2013). While I share this view that Katniss provides an affective source of identification within the stifling effects of capitalism, which is represented in both the literary and filmic incarnations of *The Hunger Games*, there is something more at work within this self-reflexivity than is accounted for in Fisher's (2013) seeming rejection of such television formulas as sites for authentic emotional responses. Not only do these films bring into focus a critique of capitalism but also the gendered labour that underpins this system, with the attendant emotional and affective regimes of work that are at the core of their narratives. It is through Katniss's character arc that we come to understand the value attached to these affective regimes and how this value is intricately tied up with particular mediated forms. Moreover, what is considered authentic or "real" in the franchise is inherently gendered, and it is precisely the ways in which these films adopt such televisual

formulas that allow these debates surrounding authenticity and affective value to be staged and, indeed, performed.

Lawrence's performance as Katniss gives depth to the films' distinctive self-reflexivity, as we see the value of affective qualities worked through on another level via her own gendered star persona, and the engagements with this. Returning to Lawrence's own star persona later in the chapter, I shall firstly focus on how *The Hunger Games* visually presents the battle between what is considered 'real or not real' within the realm of television. The discussion that follows considers Katniss's struggle to reconcile her own selfhood with her image and her search for meaning beyond that which is mediated. Throughout the four films, Katniss must navigate this messy terrain in search of authentic experience, which is a journey that can be seen to work through present discourses surrounding celebrity and the affective labour associated with such public performance of selfhood.

'Real or not real?': The "real" in reality TV

In a pivotal moment in *Mockingjay – Part 1*, Katniss visits District 8 along with her small entourage of bodyguards and camera crew. Housing pockets of the resistance efforts against the Capitol, Katniss and her crew are assigned to go out into the field and meet with the rebels of District 8 and their wounded, in an attempt to capture footage that can be used for the purposes of propaganda videos that may help rally support for the rebel cause. During their visit, the hospital is bombed and destroyed by Capitol hover-planes, which killed everyone inside it. Looking on over the burning remains of the building, the director of the camera crew, Cressida (Natalie Dormer), prompts Katniss to describe what she is seeing for the purposes of the rebel audience: "Katniss, what do you want to say?" she urges, as she motions towards the innovative camera lens in her crewman's helmet. Standing with her back to the wreckage, isolated from the rest of the group, Katniss is given a stage from which to deliver a stirring speech. Switching between different viewpoints – visualising Katniss's emotive delivery via the camera on screen and the handheld camera displaying the pro-filmic – the sequence knowingly measures the

boundaries between what happens through media and outside of it. The continuous visibility of the camera, here and elsewhere in these films, however, ultimately questions whether such boundaries even exist.

The legitimacy of Katniss's pain and anger upon seeing the burning remains of the hospital is reinforced in the close-ups featuring the faces of her comrades as they witness her powerful reaction: "If you think for one second that The Capitol will ever treat us fairly, you are lying to yourselves. Because we know who they are and what they do." This speech is intercut with Cressida watching the action on a small handheld screen as it is relayed from the camera lenses attached to Pollux's (Elden Henson) helmet: "This is what they do! And we must fight back!" Katniss shouts, pointing towards the flames, Pollux's gloved hand visible in the left of the shot. As she turns once again to face the wreckage, Cressida and Pollux still looking on in the background, Katniss stands rigidly in the centre of the frame, directing her words into another camera lens operated by Castor (Wes Chatham): "I have a message for President Snow. You can torture us, you can bomb us, and burn our districts to the ground." The camera changes to show Katniss's reflection visible in Castor's helmet visor, her forceful words and movements conveying an energy that is further emphasised as it is digitally projected onto her cameraman's uniformed, motionless form. "But do you see that? Fire is catching. And if we burn, you burn with us!" she shouts tearfully, pointing backwards towards the billowing clouds of black smoke surrounding them. The camera is once more positioned tightly in front of her face, following her as she falls to her knees. In the shot that follows situated behind the group, the camera crew continue to film Katniss as she kneels in the dirt and rubble, her head bowed to the floor. The camera then returns to her face once more, with the crackle of the surrounding flames a seemingly unforgiving sound against Katniss's silent tears and desperation.

As part of the self-reflexive position that the filmic adaptations cultivate and foster, the almost constant presence of the camera in this way seemingly acknowledges the priority of the representation over the real and, moreover, the 'fame-conferring gaze' as a legitimation of what is considered to be 'real' (Dovey in Turner 2004: 62). The visual re-

presentations of Collins's storyworld constantly draw attention to the apparatus in the production of the pro-filmic. Continually putting this on display invites reflection on the processes that are behind television's construction of this real, as well as forcing a knowing position whereby viewers are continually forced to acknowledge their seeming complicity with the violence and ritual humiliation of such programming. Reality TV programmes like *Big Brother* are built on the basis of this explicit acknowledgment of the cameras, with the fundamental premise of the show being that housemates are aware that their existence in the house is a performance, 'for the cameras, for each other and for the television audience' (Roscoe 2001: 479). This is reciprocated in the way that it treats its audience as knowing; the camera invites the gaze and, in so doing, invites them to play a central role in the construction of the narrative (Roscoe 2001: 485). The scene from *Mockingjay – Part 1*, which I refer to above, is indicative of the ways in which the films mirror such a format, with Katniss forced to navigate her existence under the constant eye of the camera. Katniss's speech is also legitimised, its very validity and emotional credibility affirmed during the moment that it is recorded and played back for an audience. President Coin (Julianne Moore), leader of District 13 and of the rebellion, reveals her support for Katniss following a presentation of a post-produced edit of the footage to District 13 and its inhabitants: "Plutarch's faith in you wasn't displaced" she states, before asking Katniss to join her on the platform adjacent to a large screen, amidst the sound of roaring applause.

As I have previously discussed, the politics of these texts are largely reinforced by the idea of "reality" that they attempt to recreate. The global success of *The Hunger Games*, amongst other factors, for example, could be tied to the franchise's timely subject matter. The relevance of its socio-political critique is evident in the likeness of its representation to the present cultural moment; which both bolsters its phenomenalism at the same time as complicating it. As Hassler-Forest explains, there is an unsettling nature to such a likeness:

> [W]hile *The Hunger Games's* storyworld in many ways does critique an oppressive political system in which a small elite enjoys massive wealth and privilege, it is at the

> same time fully immersed in the very system of celebrity culture and commodified spectacle the storyworld seemingly denounces. (Hassler-Forest 2016: 137)

The uncertainty and brazen irony presented by this position is precisely the point, however, as it forces a perspective that goes beyond the self-referential and cyclical nature often observed in postmodern media (Shugart et al. 2001: 196); explicitly addressing the ostensible futility of maintaining mediated and non-mediated boundaries in the contemporary moment. Stepping back to consider what this moment entails in more detail also reveals the significance of the shifting cultural terrain with which these texts engage.

Suzanne Moore writing in *The Guardian*, suggests that it is precisely the familiarity of the troubling imagery in these films that contribute to their powerful effects (2014). Scenes of flaming rubble and hospitals deliberately razed to the ground like those in *Mockingjay* are reminiscent of those frequently used in television news broadcasts covering present conflicts in parts of Syria, Gaza, or Iraq. Indeed, the concern surrounding the prevalence and accessibility of such footage by children in particular formed the premise of the novels (in Balkind 2014: 9). As Andrew Hoskin argues with regard to the relationship between the media and conflict, during coverage of the Iraq war in 2003, news networks 'succumbed to the entertainment format of reality television as news values were collapsed into the need for events of the moment' (2004: 59). Audiences are now accustomed to the 'live' coverage of a reality TV culture where events 'unfold in real time', thus producing 'ephemeral impressions and memories' via 'overexposure' to the media (Hoskins 2004: 75-6). Moreover, this 'around-the-clock' service of news – made up of continuously 'live on-location images' – has arguably led to 'a growing reality gap between the ocassional actuality of footage of genuine newsworthiness, and an increasingly contrived and shallow discourse covering for an absence of hard news' (Hoskins 2004: 49). The immediacy and apparent omnipresence of mediated 24-hour news arguably serves to 'lull audiences into conflating spectacle with reality' – an illusion which seemingly underpinned the propaganda of the Bush administration (Hoskins 2004:

76). In this sense, then, it is the very representation of a situation that legitimises its reality. It is seemingly the sight of the image that makes it more real to us.

Daniel J. Boorstin recognised this more than 50 years ago: 'We are haunted, not by reality, but by those images we have put in place of reality' (1992: 6). As a preliminary text to those which would come to define postmodernism (for example, Baudrillard 1981, Jameson 1991), Boorstin's *The Image* (1961), takes issue with a culture that is absorbed in the simulation, the manufactured; that which is compelled towards surface rather than substance, towards representation rather than the reality it represents. Ushering in some of the fundamental conceptual ideas informing postmodern thought, most notably with respect to the shift towards sensationalism in an age of mass mediated culture, Boorstin's (1961) reference to what he termed the 'pseudo-event' has been widely used across these attendant discourses. This describes 'happenings' that are planned for the immediate purpose of garnering media attention, often precipitating questions surrounding their authenticity as opposed to the real consequences of the event (Boorstin 1992 [1961]: 11). A 'human pseudo-event,' by the same token – a term which has now become aphorist through its usage (Turner 2004: 5) – refers to the celebrity who is '*well known for his well-knownness'*, their very existence 'fabricated on purpose to satisfy our exaggerated expectations of human greatness' (Boorstin 1992: 57-8 [original emphasis]). *The Hunger Games* evidently recognises such a fascination with the pseudo for it mines the implications of this concept for the values that are upheld within this cultural context.

These are legitimate concerns, especially at a time when many of the issues still underpinning digital culture are explicitly tied to the impact of technology and the rise of pseudo-events. Interviews, red carpet events, press conferences, and press releases were products of the increasing pressures created by 'around-the-clock media' such as television and radio, and the shift from news gathering to news making (Boorstin 1992: 12-7). Indeed, reality TV texts themselves are virtually built around an opposition between what is authentic and what is not. Such criticisms, however, do also form part of a wider field of longstanding elitist critiques of popular culture. Similar standpoints are recognisable in canonical arguments like those from Adorno and Horkheimer (1999), who

understand populist texts as part of a 'culture industry' which produces only standardised products; offering easy pleasures that manipulate society into passivity. Jameson's (1992) work offers a similar view of the effects of postmodern arts as mere surface and imitation. These accounts are reflected in more recent critical domains like tabloidisation, which references the shifts in contemporary news and current affairs, from information towards entertainment, accuracy towards sensation, and the employment of exploitative methods of representation (hidden cameras, reconstructions, and surprise guests as seen on current affairs and factual television programmes and tabloid talk shows) (Turner 2006: 491). As cultural critics have noted (Langer 1998, Lumby 1999, Turner 1999), this phenomenon was initially associated with the British daily press, but the term now encompasses these wider forms of televisual formats and media content more generally; often leading to discussions that lump popular texts together under the bracket of 'trivialisation' and a 'dumbing down' of media forms.

These discussions, as well as applying unhelpful generalisations that overlook the differences between factual television programmes and their audiences (Roscoe 2001), also reinforce a systematic bias against popular commercial television and media via classed and gendered binaries (Hartley 1996). At the root of such critical dimensions are deeply entrenched ideas regarding the gendered inscriptions of mass culture; positioning that which is subjective, passive, emotional, and fictional as feminine, against the more masculine pursuits of modernity as objective, rational, authentic, and factual (Huyssen 1986). Such gendered stereotypes have often been at the centre of ideological constructions of femininity; informing certain understandings of televisual genres such as melodrama and the soap opera to be largely coded as feminine due to their concerns with the family domestic, and the personal inherent in their address (Brunsdon 1981: 34). The feminist project has long fought against such hegemonic understandings of the personal as feminine and, therefore, not serious or political. As Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood elucidate, major strands of literature on the politics of melodrama, (itself considered a form of 'low' (feminine) culture according to hierarchical understandings), position the personal and the subjective as both intervening in and constituting what we understand as 'real'

lived, social experience (2012: 24-5). Their work and that of others run counter to such strands of hierarchical criticism that dismiss the importance of gender, attesting to reality TV as a battleground for such debates.

Liesbet van Zoonen writes that criticisms of the Dutch origination of *Big Brother* were invested in bourgeois notions of the divisions between 'public life' (the domain of men) and the 'private domain' (as occupied by women), which were seemingly threatened by this type of televisual programming: '*Big Brother* transcended this dichotomy by turning the private lives of ordinary people, with all their normal, everyday, seemingly unimportant experiences and worries, into a daily spectacle' (2001: 670). Associating this innovative initiative (as it was considered at the time) with the multiplatform media company, Endemol and their enterprises, van Zoonen suggests that *Big Brother* tapped into a wider public fascination with the 'primal experiences' and 'emotions of ordinary people' at the heart of many successful formats (2001: 670). This fascination is recognised in *The Hunger Games*, its very title setting out its rubric: while the use of the word hunger literally addresses the socio-economic inequalities that form the thematic undercurrents of these texts, it can also be read in terms of the (apparently) primal, emotional drives and desires that these forms of media and entertainment culture feed on. Games also refers to this extreme version of reality TV formatting, where contestants are grossly exploited for drama and spectacle as part of a capitalist governmentality, which also speaks to fame or public notoriety as an ideological game. Such readings thus allude to debates surrounding the seeming 'dichotomous relation between drama and reality television' (Piper 2004), the real and the performed, the authentic and the illusory, the public and the private.

The conventions of reality TV intentionally muddy these boundaries, forcing different spheres of experience together within the same format. Amalgamating a variety of different genres (the game show, make-over and lifestyle programming, the talk show, fly-on-the-wall surveillance, and the docu-soap), like *Big Brother*, *The Hunger Games* stages the aformentioned dichotomous debates within the context of 'the ultimate pseudo-event' (Turner 2004: 58). But despite the films' appropriation of these formulae and an open embrace of their contradictory allegory (Hassler-Forest 2016: 137), as well as their

apparent affiliation with the troubled terrain occupied explicitly by documentary and factual television where a 'claim on the real' arguably no longer matters (Dovey 2000: 11), the true strength of this cultural phenomenon lies in its ability to offer sobering criticism despite the playful nature of its engagement with ideology-critique.

These texts also maintain an investment in what is non-pseudo – what is "real" – which is tightly anchored by Katniss's gendered identity. Through Katniss and her struggle to reconcile who she "really" is with her mediated image, (through her subjective experience), we are given a reprieve from the 'ideological impasse' posed by the capitalist system, already identified in the work of Hassler-Forest (2016: 138) and Fisher (2009: 14). It is through moments of emotional experience, like those referred to above, wherein Katniss's performance grounds these films in the social, and, therefore, the political. The needs of her character undermine the very principles of media which tend to encourage 'ephemeral impressions and memories' (Hoskins 2004: 75). Indeed, 'Katniss fails to make authentic propaganda until she sees the damage and destruction for herself' (Moore 2014). Before moving on to address the gendered forms of labour attendant within this performance, however, it is pertinent to consider further how the translation from book to screen opens out certain tensions inherent within the constructed formats of reality TV so as to represent or, indeed, *evoke*, what is seemingly at the core of Collins's work: is it 'Real or not real?'

'Nothing can survive without a heart': Emotion and Affect

Written into the very foundations of Collins's storyworld is the power of emotional connection. Katniss's social bonds with others, both forged and tested in the pseudo realms of The Games and the Capitol, form the affective backdrop to this dystopian world. Ultimately, these human connections are how Katniss makes sense of who she is beyond the celebrity personas assigned to her via her place in the media – 'Girl on Fire', 'Mockingjay', or 'Star Crossed Lover'. Katniss's heroic actions are motivated entirely by her feelings of love and loyalty for her family, friends, and those she cares for. This

motivation is echoed in a video exchange between Katniss and President Snow in *Mockingjay – Part 1*:

> Katniss: I never wanted any of this. I never wanted to be in the games. I just wanted to save my sister and keep Peeta alive.
>
> Snow: Miss Everdeen, it's the things we love most that destroy us.

It is in this film, particularly, where Katniss begins to realise the power associated with her symbolic identity as the 'Mockingjay'. As the number of riots grow, with citizens fighting back against the brute force of the Peacekeepers[12] in her name, desecrating walls and buildings with her symbol, Katniss's media image is seen to provoke a sense of solidarity across the separate districts in Panem. Both physical and technological attacks from this civil disruption and the growing rebel movement force Snow to respond with increasing violence. Ordering public executions of those who are found to be using the Mockingjay symbol "for the purpose of sedition", as well as enforcing a ban on all images relating to Katniss and her symbolism, it is clear that Snow is as much threatened by her image and the strong feelings that it evokes, as he is by Katniss herself.

In his speech prior to these executions, screened for each district, Snow warns citizens about the price of their disobedience. Selling their insubordination as a threat to their own survival, Snow likens their labour for the Capitol as a supply of blood to the heart: "The Capitol is the beating heart of Panem. Nothing can survive without a heart." This analogy is ironically reinforced as Snow's evil empire crumbles under the strength of the bonds of love and solidarity among the people of Panem. Of course, this fight between good and evil is portrayed as more complex than this, as any challenge to Capitol power can only be read as insubordination rather than resistance – that which power needs (Fisher 2013). Katniss and Peeta's threat of suicide at the end of *The Hunger Games* was the only other alternative to the Capitol's charade, for only in death could they remain together and be truly free (Read 2012, Fisher 2013). Michel Foucault's theorisations of

[12] Peacekeepers are the homogenous soldiers who serve as The Capitol's main instruments of control, violence and oppression in the districts.

power are clearly manifested in Collins's conception,[13] for in its 'theatre' The Hunger Games assumes a 'Foucauldian set design' (the Pan(em)opticon), with its very mechanisms constructed as entertainment/ distraction for the Capitol, and reality TV forming 'a symptom of its underlying malaise' (Thomas 2013: 361).

As Mark Thomas posits, Katniss's role within The Games is ambiguous, for on the one hand her engagement shows complicity with its rules and so recognition of power as a political symbol is implicitly stated (2013: 391). On the other, Katniss's battle can be viewed differently to the ideological and hegemonic forces to which she subscribes (at least superficially), as she embodies 'the potential for relating with others through a poetic (aesthetic) dimension incommensurate with the conceptualised rigour of the 'rules of the game'' (Thomas 2013: 391). By exposing the limitations to these rules, Katniss's actions are seen as political because they undermine the power of the Capitol's political structures. Her suicide threat forces the Gamemakers to amend the rules of The Games on two occasions and her demonstration of compassion towards Rue, a younger allied tribute from District 12, singing to her upon her death and ritually decorating her body with flowers, defies the brutal principals of the arena.

Indeed, the films open out the social and emotional dimensions of Katniss's actions, offering a striking, self-reflexive visualisation of television's affective capacity. Her idealised heroism is juxtaposed with Snow's cold pragmatism, as the films extend his perspective from the periphery of Katniss's first-person narration. Snow's interactions, behind the scenes and with the Gamemakers, provide a productive counternarrative to Katniss's negotiation between her self and image, revealing more about the convolutions of The Games and their design. In the first two films in particular, Gamemakers are shown designing and 'releasing' computer-generated mutated animals (mutts) and treacherous (un)natural conditions (woodland fires, poisonous fog, rainfalls of blood) into the gaming arenas. The bestial qualities of these mutations, as well as the impassive brutishness of Career tributes (citizens from the wealthier districts who are trained and groomed for

[13] It is important to note that Foucault's theory of governmentality (Foucault 1991) and technologies of the self (Foucault 1988) have been applied to television and reality TV more broadly (for example, Ouelette & Hay 2008).

success in The Games), mirror the Darwinian rules of natural selection, whereby the strongest wins (Thomas 2013: 389). Katniss refuses to play by these rules (although arguably less so in the novels), as she only kills in self-defence, and her capacity for human connection undermines The Games's barbaric format.

The adaptation from book to film has prompted some criticism, however, on account of the loss of Katniss's first-person narration. Jason Read argues that the films offer less of how The Games are lived and more of how they are seen, resulting in, what he suggests, is a loss of 'tension between appearance and reality' in terms of Katniss's feelings (2012). I would argue that this is the point, however, for the films intentionally foreground the processes that determine how the storyworld is seen in order to demonstrate the depth of Katniss's affective power. It is from the films – crucially – that we come to understand this affective power through the lens of reality TV, as Katniss kindles the fire of revolution via sensation and feeling. While Read positions the visualisation of The Games as more akin to a 'sporting event than reality TV', with running sideline commentary (2012), the vicarious viewing of the action in sport via screen is arguably representative of the current trajectory of entertainment programming as moving towards a deeper engagement with technology as opposed to live action (Thomas 2013: 372). This is not entirely to dismiss Read's (2012) point that the adaptation to film has meant a loss of the intensity that comes with Katniss's internal narrative, but rather to argue that the tensions between what she truly feels and how this appears through media are inflected differently in the films through an appropriation of reality TV conventions.

The real strength of these texts in their visual form is located in the ways that these conventions play out on film. Although, as Read points out, the films may not articulate Katniss's inner thoughts and feelings in the same way as the books may describe (2012), her emotion can still be understood, or more importantly, *felt*, in terms of its affects, echoing Skeggs and Wood's argument that: 'reality television participants' performances are replete with gesture in which different emotional performances (anger, sadness, care) come together to produce what we see as the whole person' (2012: 66). As aforementioned in relation to the scene from *Mockingjay – Part 1*, in which Katniss

witnesses the bombing of a hospital in District 8, the constant presence and acknowledgement of the camera stages Katniss's speech in such a way so as to privilege her emotional response to the destruction. The dramatic intensity of Katniss's anger as it eventually subsides into sorrow is given priority and is measured through the camera's focus on the physical signs of this emotional performance.

Doubly, Katniss's emotions are also understood in the expressions of those standing watching her, as close-ups of their faces show the affects of witnessing this display. The privileging of the reaction rather than the action in this way has been identified as a familiar technique in (British) lifestyle programming, particularly in the make-over genre (Brunsdon 2003: 11-2). This manipulation of affect, Brunsdon argues, lends itself to melodramatic television, which can be experienced through what she identifies as 'the changed grammar of the close-up' within a 'double-audience structure': 'without the internal audience to express shock or joy or astonishment, how would we, the external audience, understand the emotional significance of what we see?' (2003: 10-1). The visualisation of the Capitol audience is featured at various points throughout the films, most prominently during Tribute Parades and interviews, with close-ups accentuating their excited facial expressions. The presence of the audience not only conveys the sheer scale and spectacle of these events but also reflects the levels of pleasure and emotion that are invested in these performances, albeit it is the tributes' suffering that ultimately becomes the fodder for their voyeurism. As I shall return to later, the close-up is also key in terms of Lawrence's performances (in these texts and beyond), and the various responses that these evoke: the hyperbolic nature of the close-up itself is deeply rooted in the universal language of the cinema, 'as the vehicle of the star, the privileged receptacle of affect, [and] of passion' (Doane 2003: 90). In scenes from *The Hunger Games*, it is this closeness of the camera that makes the depth of Katniss's emotions truly visible.

When Katniss visits the hospital in District 8 before it is destroyed in *Mockingjay – Part 1*, for example, the workings of the camera, akin to those identified above, accentuate Katniss's reactions to what she sees, as well as the reactions of those around her upon her entrance. Moreover, not only is this visible as part of the pro-filmic but the

presence of Katniss's camera crew and their apparatus, work to further embed the scopic conventions familiar to those from reality TV and factual programming. As she enters the empty shell of a building, Katniss hesitates: "Don't film me in there. I can't help them." Cressida coaxes her forward, laying a hand on her shoulder as encouragement: "Just let them see your face." The familiar hallowed voices from the non-diegetic musical motif can be heard as Katniss steadily walks beside the long lines of stretchers holding the wounded, the handheld camera following her closely from behind. A series of shot-reverse-shots capture her anxiety as she reacts to what she sees, breathing deeply to try and control her body's reaction to such visceral devastation. With the camera facing her, Katniss slowly comes to a halt as people around her begin to stand up and take notice of her entrance.

Her face is kept tightly in shot, the camera panning backwards as she walks, until a young female rebel fighter calls out her name. She asks Katniss why she came to District 8: "I came to see you", Katniss replies. After she is questioned about her pregnancy, (a lie that was fabricated between herself and Peeta to convince the Capitol and Snow that their love is legitimate), she turns to face another rebel fighter with a gun over his shoulder: "You fighting, Katniss? You here to fight with us?" The camera, slightly tilted upwards towards her face, captures Katniss's firm resolve, her voice echoing in the silence: "I am. I will." The rebel raises his left hand in the three-fingered salute as the non-diegetic motif steadily begins to build once more. As everyone in the hospital raises a hand, the camera pans steadily to focus on Katniss's stunned reaction to the show of solidarity that her mere presence has provoked. The camera cuts to Cressida, who evidently recognises the high intensity and affective value of this moment, calling on her crewman to move in tighter to Katniss, a close-up of her face captured in his visor as he moves into view. The scene ends showing the entire hospital, Katniss in the centre of the frame looking around her, as the soundtrack builds to a crescendo and cuts to black.

In moments of solidarity like these, Katniss is often positioned centrally, both spatially and symbolically. The workings of the camera here, mixing conventional observational techniques with an intimate focal length, emphasise the foregrounding of

the emotional in reality TV. The appropriation of these textual elements transposes Collins's storyworld onto the screen, thus demanding Katniss's appearance be affected by similar conditions as reality TV performances. As John Corner sets out in relation to *Big Brother*, the very 'material and temporal conditions' of the surveillance space that participants live in is built entirely for the purpose of revealing the personal through its own social environment (2002: 257). Characterised by its own 'abnormal terms of living', he argues, *Big Brother's* surveillance space creates an availability that 'is both tightly spatial and urgently temporal […] [and] in its scopic comprehensiveness, emotional' (Corner 2002: 257). The 'comprehensive availability' of the social to reality television is built for the daily delivery of behaviour to the camera so that 'the circumstances are not so much those of observation as those of *display*; living space is also performance space' (Corner 2002: 257 [original emphasis]). Thus, behaviour and emotion in reality TV are measured and arguably constrained by the artificiality of the social setting, with such behaviour predicated by the very presence of the camera.

The emphasis on performance and drama are recognised across reality TV more broadly. Within such genres as the docu-soap, realist conventions predominate alternately or simultaneously alongside the more structured, staged modes of melodrama within the same format, leading to debates surrounding the authenticity of the performance (Bignell 2005: 98). These melodramatic modes within reality TV formats present a combination of categories like the personal and the domestic with the social and the public, that have been considered to exist in tension and contradiction with previous conceptions of the documentary form. For some, this move towards more performative, subjective elements in factual programming is seen to impair its relationship with public culture due to a lack of authored direction (Nichols 1991). Conversely, in more recent accounts of reality TV, this emphasis on elements of self-performance is part of a broader cultural shift in the nature of documentary television. Situating *Big Brother* within what he terms as the 'postdocumentary' culture of television, Corner (2002) identifies elements of documentary still at work within contradictory spaces through a partial and revised form, merging elements of performance and naturalism, surveillance and display, thus shifting

discussions away from representational and moral credibility towards the more playful dynamics of aesthetics of performance that now dominate popular images of the real. Corner locates the necessity to perform within the competitively objective circumstances and contrived group dynamics associated with the 'game' format in reality TV, where 'true selves' emerge and develop from underneath and through 'performed selves' projected on screen (2002: 261-64).

Important here, however, is that the affective qualities of reality TV should not be considered in the same way as past documentary traditions. As Skeggs and Wood state: 'reality television has a different temporality and spatiality: it is the drama of the moment, immanent and evocative' (2012: 38). Further, it is the immediacy generated by these conditions of filming that underpins its authenticity: 'Audiences ideally expect cameras to capture 'real' reactions to genuine or contrived provocations and circumstances' (Nunn and Biressi 2005: 19). Emotion plays a premium role here, as it is thought of as a signifier of authentic self-disclosure within the mediated public sphere, while performativity is frequently condemned by viewers as inauthentic, particularly in the context of reality TV (Nunn and Biressi 2005: 19-20). *The Hunger Games* stages these debates through Katniss's subjective experience: what is considered to be "real" and truthful in these texts is measured *through* her feelings and emotion. The gendered politics of these debates are rendered through Katniss's constant negotiation of performative identity, as the anxiety she undergoes in each film 'resonates strongly with the precarious and unstable forms of subjectivity under global capitalism' (Hassler-Forest 2016: 140). As a media celebrity her very survival hinges on how well she is able to show her feelings. It is the re-presentation of this work on the self that I shall now turn to, paying particular attention to how the gendered dimensions of these forms of immaterial, affective labour are mined in the films.

The Personal is Political: Affective Labour and the Gendered Politics of Performance

Corner's observations in relation to *Big Brother* suggest that it is the very presence of the camera and the surveillance environment that is contrived for reality TV which creates the

parameters for the performance of the personal: the self is 'put on display' in different competitively objective circumstances and group dynamics, often revealing levels of self-display and self-consciousness that emerge and are projected on-screen as a result of these contrived circumstances (2002: 261-64). As such, reality formats foreground the personal in ways which draw attention to the labour of self-work and affective labour that participants must not only perform, but do so convincingly, or 'authentically.'

As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004) argue, under post-Fordism the hegemonic form of labour is now 'immaterial', involving the production of immaterial commodities such as an idea or a feeling. This is manifest most explicitly in popular reality TV formats. In her analysis of the production practices of MTV's reality programme *The Hills* (2006-2010), Alison Hearn notes that the white, privileged, twenty-somethings who appear on the series are both actors and their selves as they live their "real" lives in front of the camera (2010a: 61). In this way, Hearn suggests, these individuals are 'hybrid "person-characters" (Bellafante, 2009); their work/ lives are, apparently, one seamless flow of value generation. Here, "being" *is* labour and produces value, both for the individual person-characters and for their producers' (2010a: 61 [original emphasis]). Within this context, then, an individual's authenticity is precarious as the lines between performance and just 'being' become inevitably blurred. I shall return to the tensions between authenticity, labour and performance with reference to *Girls* in Chapter 3, which are explicitly brought to the fore through the series' millennial, post-recession context.

In their analysis of Lauren Conrad, the primary figure in *The Hills*, Alice Leppert and Julie Wilson argue that Lauren's reality stardom is realised 'in the near total collapse' of the distinctions between herself as a person, her performed character/ roles, and her constructed star image (2011: 265). This results in a more 'immanent structure of stardom, where the gap between the role performed by and the real life of the star is completely elided at the level of representation itself' (Leppert and Wilson 2011: 266). Ultimately, therefore, Lauren's stardom relies on the willingness of audiences to see her through the fictionalised 'real' constructed by *The Hills* – which invites intense forms of identification by adapting 'key soap opera conventions to emotionally connect the viewer

with Lauren's "real life" melodrama' (Leppert and Wilson 2011: 266-68). Helen Archer, writing of the legacy of *The Hills'* in *The Guardian*, argues that such fictions – hampered romantic story arcs and extratextual celebrity gossip about the person-characters – have now become a staple of most reality TV output, with *The Hills* paving the way for a 'post-truth' age with a 'brazen celebration of a new era […] one where reality no longer matters' (2016).

While *The Hunger Games* films are a product of the precarious mediated context they critique – influenced by reality and fiction (or the messy elision of the two) – these stories foreground the importance of emotion and feeling as a source of power and political strength. Katniss's intense fear and anxiety over her media celebrity stems primarily from her inability to perform that which is not natural to her; that which is not *felt* – a tension that is mined in part through the affective qualities of Lawrence's on-screen performance (and beyond, as the subsequent sections will show). Katniss's very survival, and that of those whom she loves, hinge on affective labour, and her unrelenting self-work and transformation. Undergoing rigorous training regimens and physical make-overs even before entering the gaming Arena for the first time, her value as commodity to the Capitol also relies on her ability to express how she feels.

In reality TV especially, '[t]o make successful television, participants need to be able to tell, and increasingly *show*, how they feel' (Skeggs and Wood 2012: 38 [original emphasis]). As Dovey notes, the confessional has become a prominent device in contemporary media culture where '[e]veryday life has become the stage upon which the new rituals of celebrity are performed' (2000: 104). Indeed, the confessional has become a dominant way in which fame is circulated and consumed (Redmond 2008: 110). Thus, even forms of factual television are 'now based upon an incessant performance of identity structured through first person speaking about feelings, sentiment and, most powerfully, intimate relationships' (Dovey 2000: 104). As Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi note, contemporary celebrities must labour as emotional subjects in the public arena; trading on intimacy via self-disclosure with audiences in order to be conceived of as 'real' and authentic (2010: 54). Katniss is forced to play this game despite her struggle to appear

likeable and friendly towards others and is strongly encouraged by her mentors to fabricate but, more importantly, *confess*, a romantic relationship with her teammate Peeta in attempts to better her chances.

Particularly important in the context of this thesis is that this mediated construction of their relationship draws attention to the complex representation of gender embodied by Katniss and Peeta, which has already been discussed widely in relation to the original novels for the ways that Collins's characterisations subvert stereotypical notions of gender performance (see, for example, Lem and Hassel 2012, Lykke Guanio-Uluru 2015). As a woman, Katniss navigates her world through action, whereas Peeta navigates his world through words, thus switching the gender roles usually assumed in Western culture (Arrow 2012: 98). Monika Bartyzel notes that while Peeta boasts brute strength, his other 'skills and interests paint him as the traditional supporting heroine […] He's a soft flower, as described in the books, a bright-yellow dandelion' (2012). As such Peeta is better equipped for the 'emotion work' (Nunn and Biressi 2010) that the couple are required to perform in order to win over the hearts and minds of the Capitol.

This is illustrated in the first film as Peeta publicly confesses his love for Katniss during a live televised interview. Forcing him against the wall with her arm locked tightly against his throat (notably inhabiting a typically masculine physicality here), Katniss is angered by such a display, claiming that it made her look "weak." As her mentor Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson) explains, however, it was precisely this that made her look "desirable": "I could sell the Star-Crossed Lovers of District 12 […] It's a television show and being in love with that boy might just get you sponsors, which *could* save your damn life!" Thus, the politics of this trade in emotion between the celebrity and the public is staged very clearly here, echoing what Nunn and Biressi refer to as the 'language of emotion and the damaged self that the celebrity figure is mediated through': 'It could be argued that the celebrity figure writes large the contradiction of contemporary identity for many citizens of the developed mediated society: the expectation that we have the right to live pain-free lives bound up with the current pressure to understand those same lives through painful emotion work' (2010: 54).

Even after their victory in The Games in the first instalment, Katniss and Peeta must keep up this purported romance as well as perform their roles as victors and Capitol sweethearts. Furthermore, even after she takes her place as the spearhead of the revolutionary campaign against the Capitol, Katniss and her image are still being used in ways largely outside of her control (Hassler-Forest 2016: 141). As spelled out by Haymitch in *Catching Fire*: "This trip doesn't end when you get home. You never get off this train." Indeed, Haymitch himself speaks from his own experience, as the horrors he witnessed for himself in the Arena, as well as watching children under his mentorship die each year in The Games, has driven him to a life of alcoholism and insomnia. The sophistication of Collins's vision lies in her awareness of the ambivalent role of mass media, as Katniss's acts of defiance are often more symbolic than literal within the stifling conditions of Panem's panoptic surveillance; her mediated image functioning as a means of affective connection between the otherwise atomised citizens of each District (Fisher 2013). Comparing *The Hunger Games* to other popular cultural franchises, Hassler-Forest argues that the 'romanticized rebels' in *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* rely on an obvious authenticity within their fictions that allows 'an exciting escape from a more artificial world' – for Katniss, however, she 'remains a pawn in a larger media game' (2016: 141).

The bittersweet ending of the final filmic instalment *Mockingjay – Part 2*, presents the vivid psychological and psychical scars rendered by this game. In a pastoral setting a more mature Katniss is seen cradling her new-born child in her arms as she looks on at Peeta, now a father, playing in warm, sunlit fields with their elder son. Beneath the seeming peace and tranquillity of the scene, however – although far removed from the pseudo-events of the Capitol – lie poignant reminders of the couple's pain and loss. As her baby wakes crying, Katniss speaks softly, reassuring her child that she too suffers from nightmares, contending with them by recalling the good and kind acts of others: "It's like a game. I do it over and over. It gets a little tedious after all these years but there are much worse games to play." Despite their survival, seemingly free of the pretence of a mediated world and from capitalism's competitive individualism of the Arena, *The Hunger Games* offers no respite from this pain and trauma.

Even in their aftermath, The Games continue to leave their mark making these texts a powerful and arresting representation of the long-term consequences of capitalism's 'affective parasitism and emotional bondage […] It's all an act, but there's no offstage' (Fisher 2013). Only in death, then, can the victors truly be free. As Read writes: 'It is not enough that the participants kill each other, but in doing so they must provide a compelling persona and narrative […] Gaining the support of the audience is a matter of life and death' (2012). The victors themselves – those who are the last ones standing in The Hunger Games Arena – all become commodities following their victory. In return for their win they are given privileged status in their districts, housed with their families but separated from other citizens in a wealthy neighbourhood called the Victor's Village. Within the totalitarian regime, even their bodies are commodified, as those among the victors who are considered to be the most attractive and desirable, such as Finnick Odair (Sam Claflin), are prostituted by President Snow to citizens of the Capitol. Further, tributes and victors are literally personalities for sale, like Katniss and Peeta, forced to play on their feelings for one another, whether genuine or not, to fulfil an identity ascribed to them.

Collins's narratives take reality TV to its 'furthest, darkest conclusion' (Balkind 2014: 10), but rather than merely 'offering a bad immanence […] that can engender only a paralysing sense of the system's total closure', Collins gives us a way out through our identification with Katniss (Fisher 2013). While I do not refute Fisher's assertion that the power of these texts is grounded in their emotional dimensions, his bracketing of reality TV, advertising and soap opera as 'consentimental' and 'lachrymose' respectively (2013), I argue, fails to acknowledge the affective capacity of these popular modes – something which Collins's novels and the subsequent films inherently articulate. The films convey Katniss and her struggle to perform authentically in front of the camera as if through the lens of television. Further, the films open out this mode in their visualisation of how television and reality TV are constructed, and in thinking about the processes that encourage intimacy between the audiences and real people/ real performers. As Misha Kavka's explication of a 'materiality of affect' in reality TV suggests: 'Contrary to Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality, which empties signification of real-world links […]

reality TV has affective reality: feeling for the participants guarantees their reality, and the fact that they are 'real' justifies the feeling' (2008: xi-xii). Indeed, what is considered 'real' in these texts is connected to feeling.

Mockingjay – Part 1 explicitly maps these politics of affect as Katniss continues to labour under the terms of her identity as symbol for the revolution. Having been liberated from the physical control of the Capitol, rescued from the gaming Arena by her rebel comrades at the end of *Catching Fire*, Katniss is taken to the underground District 13 – isolated from a natural source of light and separated from the rest of Panem under its own governmental rule. As a centre of nuclear development (Collins 2009: 166), Katniss must navigate the underground networks and political system of 13 where she is drawn deeper into rebel plans and encouraged to fully realise her value to their cause. The film's narrative trajectory takes place largely underground in District 13, foregrounding Katniss's emotional labour and conveying the immediacy of her surroundings.

Previous to her filmed excursion above ground in District 8, Katniss is made to perform as part of a propaganda video under the terms she negotiated with President Coin and Head Gamemaker-turned-rebel, Plutarch Heavensbee (Philip Seymour Hoffman). Upon agreement of her role as the Mockingjay, Katniss is made to incite revolutionary fervour among the other districts by way of a mediated campaign (seemingly exploiting the same means of drama and spectacle that built a foundation for The Games themselves). In contrast to the footage captured on the disturbed soil of a bombed-out Panem (as previously discussed), the entirety of the 'propo' sequence, from its artificial setting to the scripted lines that Katniss must deliver to the camera, are intricately constructed for effect. The importance of the materiality associated with Katniss's environment and performance is further emphasised by Effie Trinket (Elizabeth Banks), District 12's Capitol-born escort. As her name suggests, Effie exudes a love for surface and material things; her excessive femininity and hyper-white appearance (Dubrofsky and

Ryalls 2014: 405) holding further symbolic significance in and of itself.[14] Set up in her debut appearance in the first film Effie's bright, evocative, rather impractical couture outfits, make-up and accessories stand for an almost 'grotesque performance of femininity' against Katniss's ideal of a more 'natural feminine beauty' (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 405). Although Effie's own signature appearance is more restrained in this film due to the absence of her costumes and wigs, she nonetheless ensures that Katniss's make-up is fitting for her appearance on camera.

Standing on a podium in a darkened studio clad in her black, custom-made armour, Katniss faces a control booth where Plutarch is controlling sound and visuals. Upon his instruction a digitised battlefield is projected around Katniss. She turns to look at this but can only see the artificial lights lining the walls around her. Electric fans blow artificial wind towards her as she is instructed on how to deliver her lines: "Remember, you've just stormed the outskirts of the Capitol, arm-in-arm with your brothers and sisters." She stands up awkwardly from a kneeling position, limply holding a prop supposedly mimicking a flag, stuttering as she fails to remember her lines. Katniss fails multiple more times, stiffly and robotically delivering her speech; the camera switching back and forth between the booth and the studio. Katniss's own disappointment at her performance is confirmed in the dispirited facial expressions of Effie and Plutarch, as there is no evidence of the initial spark that captured the hearts of the Capitol and ignited pockets of resistance. Not being able to act 'naturally' in front of the cameras proves detrimental to how affecting Katniss's performance is perceived to be.

Rachel E. Dubrofsky and Emily D. Ryalls argue that Katniss's 'not-performing' performance – an inability to perform for the camera – is transposed onto the body in the films and is central to her racialised and gendered construction as 'deserving hero' (2014: 396). In the films, they suggest, Katniss's whiteness and normative heterosexual

[14] Effie's face is often covered in a white foundation, with the contours of her eyes, cheeks and mouth accentuated with brightly coloured make-up (see Figure 2). Her eyebrows are bleached blonde and her teeth immensely white so that her whiteness is intensified further still. The symbolism associated with those from the Capitol is conveyed largely through their costuming and make-up in the films and can be read in terms of racial connotations, as already touched on briefly in relation to President Snow.

femininity – which can both be 'read off her body' – are authenticated through conventions of reality TV surveillance and filmic mise-en-scène (such as lighting, camera positioning, make-up, and costuming) (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 401). People of the Capitol, like Effie, are marked through a 'performance' of whiteness 'through stage makeup, plastic surgery and performative presentations of artifice and crass behaviour […] caricatures of the privilege associated with whiteness', 'out of touch with their humanity […] and moral values' (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 403-04). Conversely, Katniss's whiteness appears 'neutral and naturalising' through a lack of these markers, with the use of filmic lighting emphasising her authentic 'glow […] contributing to cultural assumptions of whiteness as associated with virtue and innocence' (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 401). Thus, whiteness is confirmed as an authentic and heroic racial identity. Similarly, Katniss appears 'naturally' feminine as she refuses to perform certain gender rituals.

Using Judith Butler's (1990) theorisation of gender as a series of repeated acts and rituals, Dubrofsky and Ryalls conceptualise Katniss's on-screen gendered construction as 'performing not-performing': while Katniss manages conventional heterosexual attractiveness without effort or vanity and seamlessly enacts maternal behaviour towards her sister and those in need, at the same time she is uncomfortable in expressing emotion (a typically 'feminine' trait), shows an aversion to romance, and an express desire not to have children (2014: 404-06). A problematic paradox emerges in that these qualities of normative femininity and maternal instinct emerge innate and instinctive against Katniss's own desires and work to perpetuate narrowly defined gendered and racialised identities (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 406-07). These problematic politics, particularly in relation to race, are compounded by further criticisms levelled at the films for calling only white, Caucasian actors for the role of Katniss despite Collins arguably leaving the racial orientation of her female protagonist open for interpretation ('black hair, olive skin […] gray eyes' (Collins 2008: 9) (see Wilson 2012). The problematic politics of whitewashing in film and television are made visible to varying degrees in the case studies that make up this thesis, with Chapter 3 in particular, drawing out the symbolic significance of these classed and raced tensions of performance.

Although such charges of whiteness somewhat tarnish the feminist value often ascribed to Katniss and her characterisation (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 407), I would argue that the importance of emotion in these films is understated in Dubrofsky and Ryalls's (2014) analysis, which I shall now unpack. Following Katniss's disappointing performance in the studio in *Mockingjay – Part 1*, the scene that follows shows the finished edit of the propo video screened for some of the rebel leaders. There is a silent pause as it ends; Katniss shrinking sheepishly into her chair before Haymitch takes to the floor, asking those present to recall an instance in which Katniss genuinely moved them to feeling: "Not where you were jealous of her hairstyle or where her dress went up in flames, or she made a halfway decent shot with an arrow. And not where Peeta *made* you like her. Now, I'd like y'all to think of one moment where she made you feel something – real." From their answers – recalling when she volunteered for her sister at the Reaping, when she allied with Rue (Amandla Stenberg), a younger tribute from another district, singing to her before her untimely death in the Arena – the commonality connecting these moments was that they were candid and unscripted: "No one told her what to do." Despite expressed caution from Coin about the sanctioning of an untrained civilian in the field "just for effect", it was agreed that Katniss be sent above ground in an attempt to capture her authentic reactions to the devastation in District 8.

Dubrofsky and Ryalls argue that Katniss's bodily reactions and earnest character inhibit her from performing her authentic self – one that does not intentionally perform, or performs without premeditation (2014: 399). As such, it is the presence of surveillance that confirms her authenticity, for she is true to herself without a script regardless of the circumstances and the fact of surveillance, as stars of reality TV are expected to be (Dubrofsky and Ryalls 2014: 399). However, while the rebels simply want Katniss to give a compelling performance, – she actually *feels* it; thus allowing her to communicate the tragedy of what is real through affect. As Anna Gibbs notes: 'Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear' (2001). It is this very metaphorical meaning that Collins's work takes forth ("Fire is catching"), as Katniss's feelings of anger, rage, and

compassion for others ignites the flames of rebellion in the districts. In the studio where she is forced to perform, the movements of her body appear mechanical and unnatural. When unscripted and caught candidly by the camera, however, it appears as if Katniss's feelings erupt over the surface of her face and body. As Kristyn Gorton suggests, 'feelings are not just registered in our conscious awareness but are *felt* and enacted on our bodies' (2009: 65 [original emphasis]).

Of course, such action is still rendered through media via the presence of surveillance, edited alongside music and other textual elements in its propo form. As Gibbs notes, mass media like television amplify affect, 'heightening and intensifying affects (by amplifying tone, timbre and pitch of voices and […] by means of close ups […])', dramatically increasing the rapidity of communication of affect and extending its reach on a global scale (2001). It is first and foremost the "realness" of Katniss's feelings and experiences, however, that is central to how this affects those watching it. She seems to understand this; when asked what if her excursion above ground were to lead to her death, for example, Katniss simply replies with: "Make sure you get it on camera." As Gorton argues, 'emotion is used [in television] to create empathy between characters and viewers which facilitates their understanding and interpretation of the programme' (2009: 90). Locating emotion as a central theme of interpretation in the three mini-series of *This is England* (2010-2015) directed by Shane Meadows, Beth Johnson notes how the improvised performance from its actors in scenes of intense emotional turmoil works to 'move', 'creating scenes and stories that 'feel real' for the audience' (2017: 18). Writing of her own 'emotionally devastating' response to the harrowing experiences of Lol (Vicky McClure) in *This is England '88*, Johnson notes that this was, in part, a reaction to McClure's 'markedly tired' and 'physical performance' (2017: 22). The gravity of this interpretative labour meant that, for Johnson, she did not simply experience the mini-series' as fictional stories 'but rather had *felt* them as personal accounts' (2017: 23 [original emphasis]).

Collins's work recognises this important dynamic between television, audiences, and emotion. Not only recognising how television, particularly reality TV, enables the

Capitol to maintain imperial power over the masses, *The Hunger Games* also keeps in focus the power of feeling and emotion, even when rendered through media. As Thomas notes, Katniss's actions function as political action, especially in terms of how she moves others to act (2013: 392). This is emphasised in the films as Katniss's actions are taken 'deeply into public space' in scenes of rioting and disobedience among Panem's citizens, where rituals of compassion function not as private practice but 'as a public sign of something beyond the culture of the Games' (2013: 391-92). Similarly, Fisher notes that the political charge of these films depends on the surprising intensity of their brutality, which is affective rather than explicit (2012: 27). While Katniss's engagement in the Games is an implicit recognition of its power, she 'becomes ambiguously complicit and subversive of the Games as they are purposed' by relating with others (Thomas 2013: 391), working towards what Fisher describes as a 'reinvention of solidarity' (2012: 33).

For this reason, *The Hunger Games* has been acknowledged for its timely exploration of the geographies of body politics (including issues of race and class discrimination), including questions of emotion, and how these intersect with the wider security apparatus of the state (Kirby 2015). As Philip Kirby argues: 'The character of Katniss, as per the central tenets of feminist geopolitics, continually draws attention to the contingency and precariousness of everyday life (for some more than others) within the security state (2015: 464). Kirby highlights the importance of Katniss's innovative costuming by Cinna, offering resistance to hegemonic norms, as well as her bodily gestures (such as the three-fingered salute), which help shape ties of identification and belonging by invoking emotional reactions (2015: 466). Indeed, Kirby's analysis brings to light the affinities that Collins's work shares with the well-known feminist adage 'the personal is political' (2015: 465). The scale of the people, places, and entities that Katniss champions appears unique alongside the masculine pursuits of franchises like James Bond, who fights for queen and country, for Katniss must ultimately fight for her right to a private life, thus recognising how events at different scales intersect in relation to the individual (Kirby 2015: 468-69). Perhaps more importantly, however, *The Hunger Games*

engages with how the private and the public have, and continue, to change in contemporary times.

In *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City* (1997), Lauren Berlant argues that the political public sphere has become an intimate public sphere. According to her critique of American national culture, the public sphere no longer exists in the contemporary United States but has been replaced by a 'privatization of citizenship' which is increasingly enacted through sexuality and intimacy (Berlant 1997: 3). As Berlant argues:

> During the rise of the Reaganite right, a familial politics of the national future came to define urgencies of the present. Now everywhere in the United States intimate things flash in people's faces: pornography, abortion, sexuality, and reproduction; marriage, personal morality, and family values. These issues do not arise as private concerns: they are key to debates about what "America" stands for, and are deemed vital to defining how citizens should act. (Berlant 1997: 1)

This is not to suggest that privacy and intimacy does not have public value, but rather that the personalisation of citizenship has reconfigured the material and symbolic conditions of citizenship so that politics in public life is no longer effective. For Berlant, 'the guiding maxim might [now] be "The political is the personal"' as '"character" issues have come to dominate spaces of critique that might otherwise be occupied with ideological struggles about public life' (1997: 178). In other words, the public sphere has disappeared and made way for an intimate public sphere that is underpinned by a culture of anxiety, produced in response to shifting norms of identity, sexuality, and family in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, these new norms are seen to threaten deeply entrenched notions of "ideal" citizenship: those guided by 'the most traditional, apolitical, sentimental patriarchal family values' (Berlant 1997: 178). As the case studies in *The Queen of America* (1997) astutely address, mass media and dominant culture contribute to the intimate public sphere and its attendant ideas of nationhood, through idealised narratives and images about sex and citizenship.

In its dystopian, post-apocalyptic rendering of North America, Collins's storyworld animates the debates attendant with the intimate public sphere which Berlant (1997) conceptualises. This is evident at both a macro and micro level. How Panem came to be,

for instance, is a re-telling of America's colonial past and its reaction to mass immigration (events which are still lived and felt across the West). Built as it is on institutional racism and classism, '[n]onwhites were displaced, even within the geographical boundaries of each district – if our own history is our guide, through systematic rise in rent/land prices, incidental costs, and overall cost of living. It's an all-too-familiar process' (Arrow 2012: 26). As Berlant notes, the entry of new and different citizens into the public sphere is a source of intense anxiety, seen to threaten the perceived stability of the nation, who must be displaced, disavowed and mediated through 'a cartoon version of a crisis' (1997: 1). As she elaborates:

> In the cartoon version of the shaken nation, a citizen is defined as a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States. Portraits and stories of citizens-victims – pathological, poignant, heroic, and grotesque – now permeate the political public sphere, putting on display a mass experience of economic insecurity, racial discord, class conflict, and sexual unease. […] The experience of social hierarchy is intensely individuating, yet it also makes people public and generic: it turns them into *kinds* of people who are both attached to and underdescribed by the identities that organize them. (Berlant 1997: 1)

The Hunger Games, then, can be seen as one such cultural form which works to distract from, and sublimate threats to the nation. The propaganda video screened to the citizens of Panem before every Reaping ceremony works to this effect: by reminding citizens that The Games are reparations for past civil wrongs, the video channels the trauma of times past into a productive method of social control, which is maintained through fear and violence. In the ways that Panem keeps its citizens under control – creating division through competitive individualism and raced and classed discord so as to repress organised rebellion – shares allusions to the cultural myth of America as the land of equal opportunity. As Berlant notes of the fantasy of the American Dream: 'it promises that if you invest your energies in work and family-making, the nation will secure the broader social and economic conditions in which your labor can gain value and your life can be lived with dignity' (1997: 4).

According to Berlant, the nation is also a site of affective identification, of fantasy, longing and sentiment. While the public sphere is defined by intimacy and public feelings, where citizenship is rendered to be 'a condition of social membership produced by

personal acts and values', on a broader scale, 'the sentimental version of the nation provides a scene in which fragments of identity are held to become whole' (Berlant 1997: 5, 14). Thus, a sense of national feeling, of shared public intimacy, and indeed, unity is enacted through personal realms and particular identities, while the national narrative is perceived to be threatened by transnationalism, multiculturalism, feminism and other sex-radical politics (Berlant 1997: 18). Collins's conception of The Games can be seen as an exploration of how certain national values and ideals are mediated as part of the intimate public sphere. Indeed, victors are exemplary of how citizenship is embodied on a deeply personal level through the lives of individuals; they 'no longer belong to themselves', functioning as entertainment (Arrow 2012: 100) but, perhaps more importantly, as idealised identities through which Panem's national narrative is mediated.

The Hunger Games – especially in filmic form – also offers a vivid account of the tensions between the public and the private, embodied on a more personal level through Katniss's journey from citizen to victor, and from the Girl on Fire to the Mockingjay. Katniss finds herself at the centre of the national imaginary of Panem; having to negotiate the expectation that her life is open to the public via the lens of a camera. As has already been established in relation to reality TV, television is 'a theatre of intimacy', a vehicle for the personal and the now 'open discourse' of the confessional, which sees public life 'permanently punctured by intimate fragments' (Dovey 2000: 104-07). Through Katniss's famed subjectivity we see how the celebrity confessional 'is ideological and discursive, bound up with identity politics, power relationships, and the political economy' (Redmond 2008: 111). While the affects of ruthless individualism and immaterial labouring are stifling for Katniss – clearly elucidating the symbolic weight of her own identity as it harnesses and cultivates an intimate public – Collins's work also recognises the political power of such affective identification. As I have argued for here, emotion and feeling add to, rather than diminish the political charge of these texts. It is at this point that I shall now turn to the significance of Jennifer Lawrence, whose famed persona and performance, adds another dimension to the franchise's socio-political resonances via the emotive, affective value attached to her celebrity image.

'Star without a Script': Jennifer Lawrence's Star Image

The cover of the holiday issue of *Vanity Fair* magazine (2016-17) hails the 'freewheelin' Lawrence as the person to bring redemption to 2016. She shares the cover with other famous personalities who dominated all forms of media in the same year, most notably Donald Trump and Kim Kardashian. The main focus here, however, is Lawrence or 'J. Law!', as reads the bold white text spread across the actor's cover image. She wears a low-cut, dark red dress, and her posture, with one arm resting against a black camera stool, appears relaxed, but is suggestive of the constructed nature of this context. Her head is titled to one side, her hair blown away from her face; she is returning our gaze with only a hint of a smile. The cover story itself, 'Jennifer Lawrence, Star without a Script', spotlights her Hollywood star status and talent from the outset, clearly coding her cultural value. This perhaps exists in contrast with Kim Kardashian, whose media celebrity can largely be attributed to her regular appearances on the reality TV show, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (2007-).[15] This has resulted in some pejorative readings of her notoriety as 'famous for being famous' – a phrase resembling Boorstin's (1961) formative definition of celebrity.

As Su Holmes and Diane Negra note, popular and academic discourses surrounding stardom and celebrity have tended to proffer the latter in terms of its 'devalued currency' inextricably linked to its increasing detachment from perceptions of work, worth, and talent, whereas the former holds a more 'prestigious lineage' with its focus on the oscillation between the work (public) self and the private self (2011: 13). This 'sense of false value' attributed to celebrity (Marshall 1997: 4) is frequently echoed in media commentary on reality TV stars who are seen to be evading the "real" work needed to achieve success and fame (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 52). As many scholars have identified, the taxonomies that categorise famous people within contemporary culture bear inequalities relating to gender, social class, and race (see, for example, Biressi and Nunn

[15] Indeed, the viral circulation of a sex tape in 2007 featuring Kim Kardashian can also be ascribed to her wider renown and stand testament to the furthered emphasis on corporeal/sexual surveillance of the female celebrity, amplified by the internet and paparazzism (Holmes and Negra 2011: 7).

2005, Tyler and Bennett 2010, Skeggs and Wood 2012). This said, although the question of people simply 'playing themselves' in reality TV invokes a downgrading of fame, it is important to note, as James Bennett and Holmes do, that the concept of 'being oneself' within any mediated environment can be understood, judged, and praised on the basis of 'authenticity' as it is understood within the highly constructed and performative nature of reality TV (2010: 75).

Unlike Kim Kardashian, however, whose notoriety is predicated to some extent on a perceived 'illegitimacy' that can be linked with the 'cheapening' of female celebrity (Holmes and Negra 2011: 3), Lawrence's fame is clearly aligned to her screen acting talents or, as Chris Rojek (2001) categorised, an 'achieved' celebrity. Throughout the *Vanity Fair* article written by Julie Miller, for instance, close attention is paid to Lawrence's achievements; the incredibility of her highly successful career trajectory is readily summarised in its introductory passage: 'In a mere six years, Jennifer Lawrence has blazed past every marker of Hollywood stardom, with no sign of slowing down' (Miller 2016). Highlighting that her forthcoming films will be with acclaimed directors like Steven Spielberg and Darren Aronofsky, these extraordinary career achievements are also mapped alongside her personal journey: 'In *unreal* circumstances, Lawrence is learning to assert herself as a *real* person, whether that means equal pay, privacy, or never being a bridesmaid again' (Miller 2016 [emphasis added]). Here, the now familiar dialectics of the public/ private, the ordinary/ extraordinary are made visible, fuelling the promise of a 'real' truth ''behind the scenes', 'beneath the surface', 'beyond the image'' (Dyer 2004: 10). As Bennett and Holmes note, it was this interplay between the on-/ off-screen personae in such star discourses (Dyer 1979, Ellis 1982) through which there developed a valuing of screen acting as an achievement (2010: 73).

Lawrence's 'achievements' are very much a focus in *Vanity Fair.* The feature draws attention to Lawrence's increasing salary (commanding $20 million for her role in *Passengers* (2016), putting her in league with other 'elite' leading female actors like Julia Roberts), her numerous nominations and awards, including her Oscar-win in 2013 for her role in *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012), her on-going contract with Dior since 2012, her

experience as a film producer and aspirations for directing, as well as her 'empowering' roles that spearhead multi-billion dollar franchises like *X-Men* (2011-2016) and *The Hunger Games* (Miller 2016). Lawrence is a 'double-barreled movie star – able to attract mass audiences and critical recognition' (Miller 2016). Also of significance is the accompanying cover shoot by Peter Lindbergh, who photographs Lawrence in an array of gowns, dresses, and accessories from haute-couture fashion houses such as Dior and Alberta Ferretti. Both black and white, and in colour, the photographs capture Lawrence at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, within a mise-en-scènic arrangement that recalls an earlier era of stardom. In one particular photograph, Lawrence stands amidst a floodlit 1950s street setting, the yellow light illuminating the clouds of smoke and heavy rain around her. She is caught mid-step in a white Dior gown, her hair in a short, wavy bob that echoes the iconic style of American actor and model, Marilyn Monroe. Other photographs feature heavy-duty lighting equipment, cameras, and crewmembers. In others, Lawrence is seen holding a script, sitting on a camera dolly, and using a classic phone booth dressed in a 1950s-style trench coat.

In this cover shoot, Lawrence seems to embody nostalgia for a twentieth century Hollywood star system; one which 'perfected the institutionalization of celebrity within a system that built upon the theatrical model of stardom', wherein the film star was thought to be the highest class of film celebrity, with publicity merely helping sustain an actor's already established box-office name (Studlar 2016: 75). This embodiment should also be read in terms of its gendered connotations, particularly in relation to notions of female sexuality that Monroe's image can be seen to evoke. As Richard Dyer's work on this suggests, Monroe's image both spoke to and articulated (albeit not always straightforwardly), thoughts and feelings relating to 1950s sexuality: notably, discourses of the 'playboy' and questions of female sexuality as mystery, which, in turn, were bound up with the notions of desire (2004: 62). Moreover, Dyer's analysis argues for the malleability of Monroe's image in the ways that it could be seen to explore the price to be paid as someone who lives by being gazed at (Dyer 2004: 62-3). Indeed, Monroe's image has been appropriated by other popular female figures, perhaps most famously by Madonna.

As Georges-Claude Guilbert notes, Madonna sought not to identify with Marilyn in terms of her perceived vulnerability, but plays with her image as a form of drag offered up to the public as spectacle (2002: 146).

Guilbert reads Madonna's art as postmodern, in that it questions the validity of particular representations through their very usage (2002: 146). Similarly, in more recent accounts, Madonna's own cultural influence is positioned as part of a postfeminist 'ghosting' of an undead feminism, wherein past models of 'timeless' femininity are recycled in order to repair problems in the politics of the present (Munford and Waters 2014: 36). As Munford and Waters suggest, similar to feminist history, relationships between women in postfeminist popular culture are often characterised, or 'haunted' by patterns of inheritance and disinheritance from ghosts of feminist figures (2014: 35). The organisation of past and present 'side by side' (Munford and Waters 2014: 36) through the invocation of particular aspects of other iconic female stars seemingly works with similar effect in *Vanity Fair*. In the article itself, Lawrence is positioned within the same professional rank as other Oscar-winning female stars such as Shirley MacLaine, Jodie Foster, and Julia Roberts, while conversely pointing towards the generational dissimilarities between the young star and her predecessors:

> Lawrence has come of age as an actress in an undeniably new Hollywood frontier – one marked by declining ticket sales, expanding distribution channels, omnipresent paparazzi, and fans literally stalking their idols on the street and via social media in a relentless hunt to feed a never-ending Internet appetite. (Miller 2016)

Lawrence typifies, as did Monroe, the constant pressures of being one of the most public female figures in popular culture. The article acknowledges the demands imposed by media, fans, and by Hollywood itself, which is seemingly haunted by the memory of Monroe and the negative values of alienation and commodity fetishism that film stardom was seen to establish (Studlar 2016: 75). Simultaneously, however, Lawrence is seen as a master of her own stardom, in control of her career, and able to deal with the constraints of her public life. Thus, 'intergenerational legacies and tensions' persist through these figurations of femininity, hinting at past feminist debates that remain unfinished (Munford and Waters 2014: 136).

While noting the star's struggle for privacy within this media saturated culture, Miller hails Lawrence's personal discretion and evasion to social media as a 'throwback' to a previous age (2016); one where the boundaries between public and private were not subject to the same pervasive conditions of surveillance that modern media propagates. Even the occasional disclosure of personal details to media is rendered as carefully controlled by Lawrence and 'on her terms' (Miller 2016). A sense of growth is stated both on- and off-screen: no longer is Lawrence simply portraying inspiring young women in her films but this coming of age is underpinned with reference to a seemingly newfound assertiveness in her working life. Referenced in *Vanity* Fair, Lawrence's (2015) viral online essay published in *Lenny Letter*, a feminist newsletter co-created by celebrity feminist Lena Dunham (Chapter 3), speaks out against the disparities in Hollywood in terms of male and female salaries and the perceived negative attitudes by men towards women who are being forceful in their working negotiations.

Not mentioned here or in this *Vanity Fair* piece, although arguably implied, is Lawrence's journey from her 24-year-old self, during which time nude photographs of the actor were hacked from her iCloud account and shared on various websites across the Internet. In a previous cover story for the magazine, 'Both Huntress and Prey', Lawrence publicly condemns these cyber-attacks: 'It is not a scandal. It is a sex crime. It is a sexual violation […] It's disgusting. The law needs to be changed, and we need to change' (in Kashner 2014). This public outspokenness, a refusal to apologise, and fierce rejection of the notion that she should expect such invasions of privacy on account of her fame, can perhaps be read in terms of its political, feminist, implications. Significant is that this occurs despite being framed within the terms of a postfeminist media context; one which, as Imelda Whelehan notes, is defined by a 'current atrophy of political debate' and a nostalgia 'for the heady days of the women's movement' (2000: 179).

In many respects, what is manifest in Lawrence's public performance, and what I shall argue further here, is a perceived ambivalence to her fame. Indeed, Lawrence shows a dedication to her work while maintaining a grounded, fun, and humorous persona – one that seems, for the most part, un-phased by her pre-eminent public identity. This is

evidenced by Miller for *Vanity Fair*, who describes Lawrence as 'a typical twentysomething in some ways' (she is a fan of Beyoncé, an avid watcher of reality TV franchises, and sometimes feels insecure about her appearance), 'but with some extraordinary caveats' (she reportedly banked $46 million in 2015 and shares text message exchanges with director-friend David O. Russell) (Miller 2016). The plethora of candid moments captured during talk show interviews and at red carpet events have become an important and distinguishable facet of the star's 'authentic' image, and fundamental to her perceived 'realness'. Interestingly, as Akane Kanai notes in her analysis of the discursive and affective uses of Lawrence's image by Tumblr bloggers, the star's authenticity is drawn on primarily for her characteristics as a 'real young woman' rather than as an actor (2015: 330). This said, also underpinning Lawrence's authentic performance, despite the star's willing participation in practices that maintain her visibility, is a seeming attempt to draw attention to and pick apart the conditions imposed on her by celebrity media culture.

In *Vanity Fair*, Lawrence talks about her aversion to invasions of her personal space when in public, often with respect to people wanting to take her photograph: 'You might think you know me, but when you approach me you're a total stranger to me and I'm scared […] Privacy is a full-time job and I work very hard at it' (in Miller 2016). Here, Lawrence makes explicit the labour that she, as a star, is required to perform. Also implied in these observations is the length at which aspects of the star's life are taken '*into the limelight and under the microscope*', as is the title of Holmes and Negra's (2011) timely collection on female celebrity. Not only is Lawrence's public-self fair game for mediation and consumption, requiring constant negotiation and work, but it is now her private self that must also be laboured for under the pervasive regimes of a 'hyper-surveilled celebrity culture' (Holmes and Negra 2011: 7). With reference to how Lawrence's star image is constructed in *Vanity Fair*, I have sought to map out some of the key facets of the star's persona, which can be seen to raise important questions about the demands on female celebrities – questions that have political resonance.

A political resonance especially in relation to what *The Hunger Games* itself makes visible – the brutal nature of global capitalism's competitive individualism underpinned by

gruelling affective labour and perpetual self-transformation (Hassler-Forest 2016: 140-01). This is especially significant in the context of postfeminist, neoliberal culture, which is often largely defined for its increasing detachment from the political (see, for example, McRobbie 2004, Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b, Tasker and Negra 2007, McRobbie 2009, Zeisler 2016), and a characteristic Lawrence is seen to typify (Gay 2014c). As I shall argue further, however, the ambivalences in Lawrence's performance (and those of the other girls that I draw on in this thesis) help to productively complicate existing ways in which female identity work is conceptualised within this cultural context, as well as ultimately reinforcing my reading of *The Hunger Games* as a text with its own contradictory political resonance.

'Is Jennifer Lawrence Katniss-ing Us?': Authenticity, Intentionality, and Playing the Game

In an interview for the November issue of *Vogue* magazine in 2015, Lawrence notes: 'My idea of big-money Hollywood is the symbiotic parasite. […] You can use me; that's fine, because I'm using you, too' (in Van Meter 2015). This kind of avowal is characteristic of Lawrence's repertoire, intimating the star's awareness of the ways in which her image operates and functions as commodity within the wider cultural economy of celebrity (Dyer 1979/ 1998, Marshall 1997, Rojek 2001, Turner 2004, Redmond 2014). Of course, this self-awareness is not limited to Lawrence, especially considering that much of the contemporary coverage on celebrity itself intentionally encodes a self-reflexive narrative about 'being famous' (Holmes and Negra 2011: 8). Prominent American female singer and songwriter Lady Gaga, for example, is renowned for using her creative outlet as a means of responding to the ways in which she is discussed and represented by media.[16] Actor, writer, director, and producer Lena Dunham, is also notable for the ways in which criticisms of her work intentionally become part of the fictional narratives in her HBO series, *Girls* (2012-2017) (see Chapter 3).

[16] For two notable works that explore the meanings and performance identities of Lady Gaga see, Davisson (2013) and Gray (2012).

Self-reflexivity is a theme with entrenched cultural currency employed by celebrities to varying degrees, offering commentary on the 'business of being a celebrity' and some of the 'rules' of the game (Littler 2003: 9). As Jo Littler goes on to note, this knowingness is not merely limited to famous people but functions as part of a system wherein audiences are also increasingly attuned to these rules of celebrity (2003: 21). This knowledge is sold in such a way which fuels desire for celebrity culture while simultaneously 'poking fun' at its interaction and social rules, thus creating 'a discourse of critical and cynical distance about the celebrity-machine' that functions to continuously reform and resell celebrity (Littler 2003: 22). This speaks to changes in the hierarchies of cultural taste and value, as celebrity culture appears democratic and populist, but also illuminates the ways in which the celebrity system magnifies and seeks to buttress the individualisation of society, a key marker of the vast inequalities of wealth and power in the context of neoliberal capitalism (Littler 2003: 22).

Indeed, this is vividly staged in *The Hunger Games*, as The Games themselves force citizens to re-enact the relentless struggle for power that itself forms part of an even wider system of oppression by the Capitol (Thomas 2013), becoming an example of the very systems that it seeks to question through the meta-cinema constructed by the films (Fisher 2012, Fisher 2013, Keller 2013). Steve Cross's and Littler's examination of the trope of celebrity downfall and the delight that may be attached to this (*Schadenfreude*), demonstrates one of the many mechanisms of celebrity culture which work to block or cause a paralysis in relation to inequalities of wealth, while simultaneously bolstering the current social system and its political economy (Cross and Littler 2010 [original emphasis]). The downfall of a celebrity, for example, does not necessarily indicate the 'death' of a star but rather the death of their current image, thus enabling a recurrent cycle: 'fame, downfall, to potentially be followed by re-invention and the resituation of fame (and from then on: to be repeated)' (Cross and Littler 2010: 13). This articulation of the downfall as integral to the political economy of celebrity, which works to mobilise longevity and enables 'celebrity culture to feed […] off its own carcass' (Cross and Littler 2010: 13),

explains the potency and 'uncomfortable familiarity' of Collins's storyworld, wherein death is a constant feature of a relentless system (Shaffer 2012).

Lawrence's recognition of Hollywood's parasitic nature, then, adds yet another layer to the poignant resonance of *The Hunger Games* films, and one that deserves to be studied in greater depth in terms of Lawrence's extra-textual significations. As already stated with regard to the films' ambivalent meta storytelling, this analysis is not an attempt to refute the legitimacy of claims that the franchise upholds the very qualities it seeks to expose, but rather to explore the nuances that are upheld in Lawrence's star image that give these messy politics a different resonance. In essence, Lawrence's admission that she is both giving and taking from this system further substantiates and even stands as antecedent (as do the films) to Collins's critique. Unlike Katniss, who radically puts a revolution in motion (Fisher 2013) by aiming her arrows at the artificial arena itself (at the end of *Catching Fire*), and at those in power (killing President coin in *Mockingjay*), Lawrence's fight against the wider cultural system is limited to the 'rules of the game' and thus must be subtler.

At San Diego Comic-Con in July 2015, senior editor of the film review website *Rotten Tomatoes*, Grae Drake, interviews Lawrence while dressed in a unicorn costume. During the interview Lawrence interrupts Drake, admitting that she cannot take her seriously: "I just keep having these moments where I look at her […] and I just go, 'Look at your life. Look at what you're doing. Look at your job. I'm talking to a unicorn'" (in Rotten Tomatoes 2015). The significance of this moment is three-fold. Firstly, Lawrence's self-reflexivity draws attention to the conditions within which her fame functions, calling out the absurd, frivolous nature of this moment in its construction. Secondly, Drake's spoken association with Lawrence, "You and I aren't so different, as it turns out" (in Rotten Tomatoes 2015), is given a deeper level of meaning through the mythical, magical connotations attached to her unicorn costume. This further emphasises that her stardom relies on a presentation of self; a kind of masquerade; an image which draws attention to 'itself *as* surface' (Dyer [1986] 2004: 15 [original emphasis]). Finally, while Lawrence interacts face-to-face with Drake, she also acknowledges the gaze of the camera, and by

extension, acknowledges the participation of the audience within this keeping up of appearances. On the one hand, there is a willingness to play along and keep up the charade, often in similar playful ways such as this that imply a certain level of enjoyment. On the other, Lawrence's light-heartedness could indicate that her investment in this game occurs only at surface level and is something that she does not intend to take too seriously.

This would seem to corroborate with other statements Lawrence has made which suggest there are limits to how much she is willing to compromise of herself for her fame: 'I can live this life in my own way […] there are ways of joining Hollywood without being someone other than myself […] I don't have to go to the Chateau Marmont to have a birthday party' (in Barnes 2016b). Similarly elsewhere, Lawrence has commented on the transience of her popularity and how it is seemingly reliant on the fickle nature of public interest: 'I feel like I'm becoming *way* too much and need to calm the hell down […] They like me now, but I'm going to get *really* annoying really fast' (in Ryan 2013 [original emphasis]). Indeed, Lawrence has often garnered attention for her bubbly, down-to-earth star image, with her unscripted, candid moments celebrated for revealing a laid back, sometimes clumsy approach to stardom. Memorable instances like this include a number of trips and falls at renowned Hollywood events, perhaps most notably when ascending the stairs to accept her Oscar for Best Actress in 2013, and then again upon her arrival at the 2014 Oscar ceremony. Other of Lawrence's signature mishaps include several fashion malfunctions on-stage and off, inconspicuously spilling mints during a press conference for *Catching Fire*, and flubbing Bill Clinton's name when introducing him to the stage at a media awards event in 2013.

Invoking Dyer's (1979) guiding terminology, Marshall notes that it is these moments or 'glimpses' of the star outside of their constructed world that produces a 'reality-effect': the source of the self and of the individual are momentarily exposed to reveal what they are *really* like (2006a: 3). Elsewhere, Marshall states that celebrity is often specifically about these extra-textual dimensions for they are 'discourses of revelation of the private self that we read […] to uncover the "real" and authentic person behind the public display'

(2006b: 639). It is perhaps a result of the extent to which her star image has been saturated with these revelatory discourses that Lawrence can be seen to be 'effortlessly authentic and accessible', with her charm appearing to be 'intrinsically natural' (Kanai 2015: 328-9). Kanai suggests that, for this reason, 'artifice' is bounded more in Lawrence's on-screen work rather than 'spilling into' her extra-textual performances, as she is primarily seen for her characteristics as a 'real' young woman (2015: 330). It is important to note, however, that the star's purported authenticity has not always been received unquestioningly.

A counter discourse to that typified in the *Vanity Fair* article discussed above, marks another noticeable strand of popular commentary regarding Lawrence, which offers a more cynical viewpoint about the star's purported authenticity. Jordan Hoffman, writing for pop culture website *Vulture*, for example, proposes Katniss and Lawrence to be 'a wonderful alignment of artist and repertoire', for they both must exploit their situation in order to protect their own interests (Hoffman 2013). But while Katniss is scrutinised for struggling to perform something that she did not feel, or react convincingly to something that did not feel "real", it is precisely Lawrence's seeming lack of an act that is read as an act in itself. As Hoffman provocatively argues: when your personal brand is authenticity, which is 'anointed' by fans, 'that is real cultural capital that needs to be protected, and likely orchestrated' (2013). Rather than not being convincing enough, then, Lawrence's supposed authenticity is read, by some, as too good to be true. Hoffman concludes his discussion with a familiar bone of contention: 'Is Lawrence Katniss-ing us? And if so, how much longer until people get tired of the show?' (2013). Indeed, this question appears well placed given that, more recently, media texts about Lawrence would suggest this predicted backlash has already taken effect.

Following the intense fervour surrounding *The Hunger Games* franchise, the final film, *Mockingjay – Part 2*, was considered 'disappointing' in terms of its opening weekend box office gross of just over $102 million (Box Office Mojo 2017a); this prompted media speculation regarding some apparent cracks in Lawrence's 'American Sweetheart' façade (Murphy 2016). This was compounded by her behaviour during an interview backstage at

the 2016 Golden Globe Awards (for which she won a Best Actress award for her role in *Joy* (2015)), where her response to a reporter was considered rude and distasteful. Lawrence first called out the reporter for using his mobile phone while directing his question to her: "You can't live your whole life behind your phone, bro […] You gotta live in the now" (@Variety 2016), mockingly moving her finger from side to side and dropping her hand downwards in front of her face as if imitating a spiritual meditation. Lawrence then challenged him further following his question about the Oscars: "We're at the Golden Globes. If you put your phone down, you'd know that" (@Variety 2016). While many at the press conference were reportedly amused by the incident (laughter is clearly audible), Lawrence's teasing remarks received severe criticism across the Internet, considered to be cruel and culturally insensitive given speculation that the reporter was using his phone for translation purposes as a member of the foreign press (see Lang 2016).

Lawrence's 'calling out' at the Golden Globes represent the star's inevitable fall from grace; a noticeable juncture within an on-going cycle of fame for which she seems entirely prepared. Indeed, this reflexivity is an indicative part of the 'adulations and humiliations' that are routinised continuously in order to fuel the longevity of celebrity (Cross and Littler 2010: 18). The noticeable shift away from the usual wave of positive publicity encircling Lawrence's star image is epitomised by pop culture pieces such as, 'Jennifer Lawrence is no longer the Cool Girl – but is it bad for her career?' (Murphy 2016), and 'We Have Reached Peak Jennifer Lawrence' (O'Keeffe 2016). Both articles refer to other female stars such as Jane Fonda, Clara Bow, Mila Kunis, and Brie Larson, whose 'Cool Girl' personas supposedly replicate the performance of a 'dude' in terms of a down-to-earth confidence and privilege, while masquerading in the body of a supermodel (see Petersen 2014). Also brought into focus here, are the culturally entrenched hierarchies of female celebrity organised through a 'prestigious lineage' predicated on work, worth, and talent (Holmes and Negra 2011: 13, Nunn and Biressi 2010: 52), which these articles perpetuate as much as they claim to repudiate in their comparisons. Lawrence is by no means in need of a major comeback like those who have been labelled 'trainwrecks', such as Britney Spears and Lindsay Lohan, for Lawrence is still an 'A-list starlet with international appeal

and massive financial power', Murphy (2016) assures. Lawrence is merely a victim of an 'unfair cycle for actresses', as she joins a list of other notable Hollywood stars like Anne Hathaway, Gwyneth Paltrow and Kate Winslet, who have all been 'dethroned' but continue to be beloved in the business (O'Keeffe 2016). Indeed, the shelf life of female celebrities is as seemingly ephemeral as celebrity culture itself, if not more so.

As Marshall notes, the ephemerality of fame means that it can be attached and detached from individuals with relative ease, occasionally correlating 'with deeper issues and more profound essences', although fundamentally superficial in its design (2004: 21). Lawrence's star image seems to be exemplary of the ways in which these axes correlate; integral to her star signification is how Lawrence comes to represent a humanness beyond her artifice. Yet at the same time her public fall from grace is purported to have revealed the 'real flesh-and-blood human' struggling with the weight of living up to an impossible Hollywood fantasy (Murphy 2016). When considered alongside other ambivalences in her star image, however, this would seem to be a recognisable negotiation rather than a candid mishap. In both of the interview situations drawn on here, Lawrence's interruptions, although inflected differently, display a reflexivity that ultimately calls into question the superficial qualities of the famous life that she leads. While her apparent demeanour towards the reporter at the Golden Globes suggests more of an underlying irritation than is expressed in her humoured reaction to Drake's unicorn costume, both interruptions arguably seek out something "real" beyond the material parameters of the situation Lawrence finds herself in. She disrupts the structured form of the interview and diverts the personal response anticipated by the question by redirecting the focus to the surrounding situation. Although still 'playing the game' in the sense that she must keep herself visible, Lawrence's self-reflexivity can be read as an attempt to rupture temporarily the monotony of the celebrity cycle which inevitably governs this visibility.

Seemingly at play in Lawrence's star image are negotiations that have long been fundamental to cultural understandings of fame. As Holmes notes in her article revisiting the relevance of Dyer's seminal work to understandings of contemporary celebrity culture, notions of 'depth' and of a 'true', 'inner' self still drive this expanding field of study; even at

a time when contemporary discourses of fame seek to emphasise 'newness' and change (2005: 14-8). Recent strands of celebrity studies, like that of persona studies, seeks to identify individual styles of public display and expression in an environment of intense visibility largely affected by the impact of prolific online cultural practices (Marshall et al. 2015). While relying on new methodologies and approaches to advance these investigations, such applications still recognise the importance of the 'textual materiality of the celebrity's images and actions' (Marshall et al. 2015: 290-300). As Holmes also points out, regardless of how self-reflexive and ironically playful contexts of fame have become (reality TV and celebrity magazines, for example), there persists a continued underlying negotiation of authenticity (2005: 14-6).

Indeed, Dyer's work presented negotiations between the star image and the "real" self that still apply to the broader context of human identity and selfhood; questions relating to the distinctions between public and private; between an inner self and public presentation: 'Dyer pointed not only to the shoring up of the concept of the individual, but also the ways in which stars work through its anxieties, articulating both the promise and the *difficulties* of its status' (Holmes 2005: 14-5 [original emphasis]). Such conceptions are remarkably relevant to Lawrence given the ways in which her star image so readily engage these increasingly timely cultural anxieties, that is to say nothing of her role as Katniss. Sarah Banet-Weiser's articulation of the twentieth century as 'an age that hungers for anything that *feels* authentic', where we are plagued with 'the looming sense that we are not real enough' (2012: 3-10), tallies very closely with the premise of Collins's work. Outside of her role as Katniss, Lawrence's ambivalent star performance seems appropriately placed in a culture wherein authenticity itself is trademarked; blurring the boundaries between authentic and commercial branding practices (Banet-Weiser 2012: 3-10). Moreover, as Banet-Weiser's work makes clear, these dissolving distinctions have come to be expected in a postmodern culture characterised by irony, parody, and the superficial, and even areas of our lives which were once considered to be non-commercial, or *authentic* – including the self, politics, and creativity – are now branded spaces (2012: 10-4). As I show in relation to Dunham's work in the following chapter, an embracing of a

feminist self as brand is complex and often contradictory with respect to discourses of neoliberalism and (post)feminism.

For female stars and celebrities, authenticity is an especially important part of public performance in postfeminist culture. As Kanai notes, under postfeminist strictures, female celebrities are increasingly called upon to labour as natural, authentic subjects while simultaneously meeting stringent standards of femininity (2015: 328). Indeed, it is not simply observing and achieving successful femininity which counts towards their 'worth' – the markers of which include a slim, white, youthful beauty, an equal work/ life balance, and the possession of a faithful, heterosexual partner – but it is doing these things 'authentically' that matters most (Kanai 2015: 328). In postfeminist media culture, femininity is figured as a bodily property, whereby a woman's body, although presented as a source of power and identity, also requires constant monitoring, surveillance, discipline and remodelling through consumer practices, in order to conform to conventional ideas of feminine attractiveness (Gill 2007a: 255). As Kim Allen notes, however, the female celebrity body is a perilous terrain, in that while it is a site of punitive surveillance and central to the construction of authenticity, the performance of femininity, governed by attendant postfeminist strictures, can be seen to complicate the performance of a 'true' authentic self (2011:162-69).

The importance of Lawrence's gendered performance, in terms of how readily these entanglements between femininity and authenticity are put on display, has already been noted in Kanai's (2015) analysis, thus reinforcing the significance of Lawrence's celebrity identity work within a landscape replete with female stars. Kanai posits that Lawrence's trips on the red carpet, her swift alcohol consumption at awards ceremonies, enthusiasm for food, and 'tomboyish activities' may afford her a funny, likeable, down-to-earth, and even rebellious authenticity, but this seemingly does not transgress the boundaries of normative femininity (2015: 329). Doubly, Kanai's (2015) positioning of Lawrence's affective labour as instrumental to the star's apparent accessibility, demonstrates the felicitousness and pertinence of the meanings associated with her identity beyond the realms of its original construction. Despite her rebellious tomboyishness, however,

Lawrence's accessible and authentic performance is seemingly constrained by certain postfeminist strictures of surveillance and regulation. Kanai (2015) argues that this is confirmed via the ways in which certain Tumblr bloggers use this celebrity image to demonstrate their own navigation of similar postfeminist rules of feminine subjectivity.

While Kanai's (2015) analysis makes important observations regarding how celebrity culture is 'put to work' by individuals choosing their identity (Turner 2004: 103), what needs to be questioned (resonating with other work on postfeminist media studies), is the somewhat totalising way in which Lawrence's authenticity is understood. What is debateable in this instance is how Lawrence's authenticity is assumed to be wholly a form of affective labour in Kanai's (2015) work. Should appropriations of Lawrence's image by bloggers always be taken to confirm such a totalising view of her celebrity image rather than perhaps re-creating and drawing attention to the already contradictory potential of her performance and wider star image? Moreover, the ways in which Lawrence's feminine subjectivity and its attendant labour is understood as normative and natural in terms of her performance, I argue, is not altogether representative as it fails to capture the complexity and contradictory nature of what is at play.

In the remainder of the chapter, then, I shall interrogate Lawrence's performance of femininity within a postfeminist context but with a focus on particular corporeal tensions that are put on display. With reference to Lawrence's physical performance – notably her unusual facial expressions and gesticulations, and her engagement with paparazzi – I argue that this embodies both a significant negotiation of authenticity and a greater depth of ambivalence towards postfeminist logics than has currently been argued in the literature, particularly in relation to normative ideas of gender. Not only is this negotiation significant in terms of the way she can be seen to both exploit and efface her affective labour (Kanai 2015: 330), but when read alongside other aspects of her star text, such as her outspokenness about privacy and gender disparities, Lawrence's image can be seen to engage with gendered power dynamics on a broader political level. Further, drawing on examples of how Lawrence's image is used by bloggers on Tumblr, I argue that such

appropriations extend the already contradictory potential of her screen performances, particularly in relation to *The Hunger Games*.

'Perfect. Mostly because she's not': Lawrence's Postfeminist (Im)Perfections

Appearing on NBC's late-night talk show, *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* in May, 2014 Lawrence walked out on to the set amid applause and laughter, with a short, blonde hair extension strip attached to her chin. Once seated and having removed the strip from her face, Fallon questions the star about this comical, yet seemingly strange behaviour, to which she responded: "Well everybody is talking about how Jennifer Lawrence is growing her hair out a little bit, so I decided to grow my chin out a little bit…Hollywood style" (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon 2014). Following this, Lawrence clarifies that her hair growth is due to extensions – "it's all fake!" (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon 2014) – and the interview proceeds with a humorous re-enactment by herself and Fallon, recalling the time that they asked Jennifer Lopez ('J-Lo') to dance with them at an event in New York, to which the singer kindly refused. Lawrence's appearance here, like on many other popular televised talk shows, is indicative of her ''just like us' celebrity self' (Kanai 2015: 330), with the interview typically focused on encouraging the star to expose humorous, often embarrassing anecdotes about herself – of which there are many.

Such revelatory modes of self-disclosure and confession remain the focus of a great deal of academic study in the field of contemporary celebrity (see, for example, Nunn and Biressi 2010, Redmond 2011). As Sean Redmond notes, confession authenticates, validates, humanises, extends, and enriches celebrity identities, making them appear truthful, emotive, and experiential in an otherwise highly simulated media culture (2008: 109-10). Indeed, within the staged environment of *The Tonight Show* set, which appears theatrical in its presentation, adorned with wooden floors and blue curtains, a live band, and a backdrop of the New York City skyline, Lawrence's animated movements and lively demeanour punctuate the artificiality of this space.

Broadly speaking these moments of self-disclosure have become part of the 'emotional literacy' we share with celebrities and the 'intensification of intimacy we are

invited to feel with their feelings' (Littler 2003: 18). This 'evocative meaning' attached to public personalities, as Ernest Sternberg's (2006) work shows, is crucial to a new economics of self-presentation under 'phantasmagoric capitalism'. Within this style of self-presentation, labour has become intimate and personal, and the ability to present oneself is considered as a critical economic asset (Sternberg 2006: 418-20). Performers gain market value through the successful mobilisation of demeanour, conduct, gesture, and attributes such as clothing, body position, and accessories, which touch on 'realms of meaning' that consumers may find evocative (Sternberg 2006: 426-30). As Redmond notes, celebrity ignites a 'frenzy of feeling', attaching itself to a wider culture 'where sense and sensation, revelation and confession, outpouring and gossip have begun to shape the pulsating veins and arteries of everyday life' (2016a: 352). We are 'compelled to feel' by celebrity, Redmond argues, but only in the service of late capitalism and liquid modernity: 'Emotional celebrity pricks us to feel but in limited ways, creating the conditions for the manufacturing of the neoliberal self that restricts and channels our egos so that we work well, consume well, reproduce well' (2016a: 352).

Redmond's work (2014, 2016b) draws upon phenomenology and sensory aesthetics to position affective responses to emotional celebrity as existent outside of language and representational discourse – beyond feeling. Another notable strand of contemporary celebrity studies concerned with emotion and perhaps one that is more useful here, draws on the sociological concept of 'emotion work' described by Arlie Russell Hochschild (1979) as the act of 'working on', 'managing', or 'shaping' what one 'should' and is 'expected' to feel in a given situation. Considering Erving Goffman's (1959) influential work on the dramaturgy of everyday life, Hochschild argues for a deeper understanding of display via 'feeling rules', according to which feelings may be judged appropriate, or not, given a particular situation (1979: 563-66). Feelings should be carefully managed so as to sustain publicly observed facial and bodily display appropriate to the context; 'emotional labour' that is often marketed efficiently under capitalism (Hochschild 1983/2003: 7). In their oft-cited article, Nunn and Biressi (2010) draw on Hochschild's work to consider the affective demands placed upon celebrities in certain media spaces such as the broadcast interview,

reality television, and confessional journalism, wherein particular 'feeling rules' operate and regulate their performance as 'emotional labourers' (see also, Overell 2005, Hesmondhalgh and Baker 2008, and Sternberg 2016). As Nunn and Biressi note, labouring as emotional subjects in the public arena, celebrities must readily express and successfully manage their emotions in contexts of high visibility so as to demonstrate their true, authentic selves (2010: 54).

The one-to-one interview is a platform that elevates this emotion work; facilitating 'a public performative space for celebrity intimacy and the excavation of the public persona' (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 55). The relaying of the celebrity life story within these one-to-one situations demonstrates and expresses a self-understanding through confession and introspection on the behalf of the celebrity, while ensuring the maintenance of themselves as a viable public commodity (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 50). Personal disclosure in the form of 'authentic' or 'truthful' insights act as a currency with which the celebrity can trade with audiences or fans for their returned invested interest; a 'contract' which is highly lucrative to the circulation of celebrity in contemporary media markets (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 50). As already noted, such work as part of the intimate public sphere (Berlant 1997) is explicitly staged in *The Hunger Games*, but this is given further resonance upon consideration of its extratextual dimensions. Lawrence's authenticity is linked to a purported 'realness' insofar as she appears mostly grounded, likeable, and even relatable on account of her personal disclosures. The star's candidness, humorous self-deprecation, and anecdotal confessions convey an 'ordinariness' that cuts through the smoke and mirrors of fame that celebrity culture seeks simultaneously to maintain and unravel (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 53). As her aforementioned appearance on *The Tonight Show* illustrates, references to everyday experiences like the consumption of alcohol, dancing in a nightclub, and her feeling of embarrassment in front of someone with a well-established career and reputation, seemingly play into this idea of Lawrence as a 'normal', 'real' young woman.

In an article for female-oriented pop culture blog *Jezebel*, Tracie Egan Morrissey (2013) traces the qualities recognisable in Lawrence's star performance that make her

seem as if she could be 'Your New Best Friend'. Among these are her love for food and reality TV, her loss of composure and crassness at formal events; particularly when meeting other famous people, and her goofy, sometimes 'weird', mannerisms (Morrissey 2013). As Kanai observes, Lawrence's affective practices of humour, fun, and accessibility are key markers of her authentic feminine subjectivity; coded as both 'sociable' and 'highly individual' (2015: 335). While able to flout conventional rules relating to elegance, moderation, and control, Lawrence's transgressions remain 'safe' and 'fun' as they are practised through a youthful, white, heterosexually attractive, coded body (Kanai 2015: 334-5). Morrissey's article explicitly underlines Lawrence's navigation of the fragile tightrope between individual authenticity and conventional femininity: 'Jennifer Lawrence is a conventionally beautiful, famous, successful, 22-year-old [at the time of writing] Academy Award-winning actress with a nice rack and good hair. She's also crass without being offensive, self-deprecating without being a sad sack, and dorky without being "adorkable"' (2013). Also significant here is that Lawrence is still deemed successful despite her imperfections: 'Basically she's perfect. Mostly because she's not' (Morrissey 2013).

Through a postfeminist lens, the 'perfect' has become a component of a competitive neoliberal individualism that, as Angela McRobbie (2015) explains, calls on young women to seek self-definition through intensive self-regulation. Within this cultural landscape, feminism has re-entered political culture, civil society, and popular media following a period of castigation and disavowal (McRobbie 2004, McRobbie 2009, Munford and Waters 2014), now to be associated with inner-directed endeavours and individualistic striving for "excellence" at the expense of collective solidarity; thus perpetuating existing patriarchal power relations (McRobbie 2015). Akin to the 'autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject' of neoliberalism, the postfeminist subject is 'active, freely choosing, [and] self-reinventing'; driven by 'a current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any ideas of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influences beyond themselves' (Gill and Scharff 2011: 7).

In her influential work, *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009), McRobbie recognises a 'double entanglement' in postfeminist culture, whereby feminism is 'taken into account'

only to be repudiated; a terrain within which young women are thought to be equally empowered by choice and opportunity; wholly responsible for their own success through disciplined management and monitoring of the self, regardless of markers such as race, gender, or social class.[17] Recently, this emphasis on individualisation has become more defined and made compatible with a renewed feminist presence (Valenti 2014, Banet-Weiser 2015a, Gill 2016a, Gill 2016b, Keller and Ryan 2014), which equates female success with the illusion of control through the idea of 'the perfect' (McRobbie 2015: 4). As McRobbie argues, this sense of 'being in control' is principally manifest in the careful self-government and self-management of successful femininity, whereby aspects of a woman's life, such as her work, her home, her sexuality, her body and appearance, must be constantly calculated and regulated based on an aspiration for a 'good life' (2015: 9-10).

These ideals of success and self-reinvention are embodied by Anita Harris's model of the 'can-do girl', who must excel in all areas of her career and lifestyle, and whose failings are dependent upon a lack of 'strategic efforts and good personal choices' as opposed to broader inequalities (Harris 2004: 32). Similarly, McRobbie's 'top girl' is understood to be an ideal subject of female success; an 'embodiment of the new meritocracy' who is attributed a new hyper-active capacity for self-perfection under a postfeminist guise of economic and gender equality (McRobbie 2007: 721-22). As already mentioned, the 'Cool Girl' and her mythical presentation in popular culture is subject to a careful balance between asserting one's liberation and freedoms as a woman, while maintaining a desirable feminine persona (Petersen 2014). Although Lawrence may have more recently fallen prey to the inevitable cultural backlash inherent in this transient image cycle (Petersen 2014), with recent media controversies[18] seemingly diluting the credibility of this supposed carefully packaged performance, it is useful to note how her failings may still be considered tokens of a 'Cool Girl' (im)perfection.

[17] For discussions on 'choice' and 'empowerment' in postfeminism see Gill (2007a), Gill (2008), Burkett and Hamilton (2012), and Banet-Weiser (2015b).

[18] See Yahr (2016). Further to the incident at the 2016 Golden Globes already discussed, Lawrence's appearance on *The Graham Norton Show* later that year sparked criticism for the star's perceived lack of cultural sensitivity. Delivering an anecdote about an incident involving 'sacred rocks' while filming in Hawaii, Lawrence laughingly recalls how she had used one of the rocks to relieve an itch, causing it to come loose from its elevated position, which the native people took as a sign of a supernatural 'curse.' Lawrence later apologised for the incident.

As Petersen observes, Lawrence's seemingly 'unpolished' persona, on the red carpet, in paparazzi photos, in acceptance speeches, and swearing on camera, make her appear *human*, but ultimately 'she's operating on another level' (2014 [original emphasis]). The familiar binary 'ordinary/ extraordinary' (Dyer 1979, Dyer 1986) is at work here, in an image that, for the most part, is seen to amplify both sides of this coin in equal measure. The two controversial incidents aforementioned have since disturbed this balance, however, as in both instances Lawrence appears to display a blindness to differences of race and culture beyond her own. As a postfeminist subject, Lawrence seemingly enjoys the trappings of success and privilege that her white, middle-class status affords her, sometimes expressing a blatant disregard for these freedoms. Despite perhaps being a product of a youthful naivety, such displays of indifference reverberate at a particular juncture wherein discussions regarding issues of race and diversity are becoming increasingly poignant and widespread in popular culture and worldwide politics.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, for instance, received intense scrutiny in 2015 and 2016 consecutively, for failing to recognise any actors of colour among their chosen nominations in the top four categories at the Oscars. Outrage was heavily reported globally by news outlets and a social media backlash ensued, headed by the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite (see Mcleod 2016). Similar issues were raised in the music industry in the furore that followed Adele's victory over Beyoncé for 'Album of the Year' at the 2017 Grammy Awards. In her acceptance speech, white, British singer-songwriter Adele, made a frank admission that she did not deserve the award over black, American singer-songwriter Beyoncé, whose work she recognises as "empowering" and "monumental", especially for people of colour (Coel 2017). This brought to light questions about the longstanding prejudices against artists of colour that have plagued the music industry and the Grammys, in particular (see Hann 2017).

As shall be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, issues of race and privilege also extend with increasing intensity to feminism and its multiple manifestations in popular culture and academia. For example, issues of intersectionality are becoming more widespread within scholarship addressing postfeminism, with accounts that challenge the

exclusivity of the concept when it is only applied to white, heterosexual, privileged women (see, for example, Mohanty 1988, Butler 2013, Negra and Tasker 2014, Dosekun 2015). Also relevant is what Rosalind Gill refers to as 'the cool-ing of feminism' across media and celebrity culture (2016b: 618). Feminism may now be considered a desirable and stylish identity, made popular through celebrity and corporate endorsements, but is problematised by its lack of diversity and emancipatory movement (hooks 2000, Gay 2014c, Jonsson 2014, Hamad and Taylor 2015, Keller and Ringrose 2015, Zeisler 2016). In spite of work by contemporary feminism which seeks to engage in a politics free from privilege, as Andrea Ruthven notes, 'postfeminist discourse appears to ignore wilfully the ways in which the individual can mobilise the collective, preferring instead to privilege acting and speaking for individualistic purposes' (2017: 50).

Situating Lawrence within this postfeminist context, her star image and even the characters that she portrays typify this exclusiveness. Lawrence is ascribed with a forever-youthful femininity via her status as a 'girl' figure, whose imagining in popular media culture is usually white, middle-class, and heterosexual, a marker of female liberation and an identity that is presumed to be universally available to all (Tasker and Negra 2007: 18).[19] As McRobbie notes, such a space of youthful girlishness is occupied by other popular figures such as Carrie Bradshaw (Sarah Jessica Parker) from *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), pop singer Kylie Minogue, and Lena Dunham from *Girls* (2012-2017) (2015: 11). Focusing on the latter, in particular, McRobbie argues that although Dunham's work provides a counter to the typical celebrity mode of perfection through her self-reflexive narratives that intentionally highlight her fall from this ideal, such 'imperfections' are cushioned by the privileges inherent in her young white womanhood and framed within a process of 'growing up' (2015: 12-5). Although Dunham's references to medication, therapy, her issues with bodyweight, and self-esteem highlight a vulnerability and fragility, McRobbie suggests there is a burden of female selfhood that, within a space of seemingly endless youth, licenses a regrettable self-obsession and superficial 'quasi-feminism'

[19] For accounts that discuss applications of the term 'girl' to middle-aged/ older women in postfeminist culture see Dolan and Tincknell (2012), Jerym and Holmes (2015), and Whelehan and Gwynne (2014).

(2015: 15). Although I question the legitimacy of this critique to some extent in my own analysis of Dunham and her work (see Chapter 3), her performance *does* seem to reinforce hegemonic cultural norms by conforming to certain measures of self-surveillance under neoliberalism.

Similarly, as Petersen observes, Lawrence's performance can only be perceived as 'progressive' insofar as she seemingly offers an 'almost masculine' alternative to the 'polished, performative femininity' that is a staple of postfeminist times because, ultimately, her uncouth, assertive, sometimes unruly demeanour, is still confined within the boundaries of a dominant corporeal femininity (2014). Indeed, Lawrence eating pizza at the Academy Award ceremony in 2014, ebulliently dancing with Jimmy Fallon on television, and boisterously imitating Liam Hemsworth during an interview, are examples whereby the star's performance as 'Cool Girl' momentarily expels the conventional coding of sexy and feminine without straying too far from gendered norms that conforms how she looks (Petersen 2014, Kanai 2015). Fears surrounding feminine excess and dominance are hereby placated by Lawrence's charming and humorous girlishness that is wholly suited to a postfeminist system (Kanai 2015: 333-6). It is here that I wish to interrogate this interpretation by giving nuance to Lawrence's performance of femininity; illustrated through further textual analysis of her star image and appropriations of this by fans and online bloggers.

'Katniss, your Jennifer is showing': Jennifer Lawrence, *The Hunger Games*, and Digital Fan-Work

Recalling her comical entrance on *The Tonight Show*, Lawrence makes explicit reference to how aspects of her appearance – namely her hairstyle in this particular instance – have become the subject of discussion in the popular media. In her announcement, Lawrence attempts to separate herself from this mediated construction using a third person register: "everybody is talking about how Jennifer Lawrence is growing her hair out a little bit" (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon 2014). In so doing, she effectively deconstructs certain 'visual, verbal and aural signs' (Dyer 1979: 34) which form part of her mediated star

image. This kind of commentary regarding how her star image is carefully constructed appears consistently across various layers of Lawrence's performance. This can be observed in her numerous references to her publicists and their advice regarding her conduct during interviews ('We think that you should stick to coffee or tea. No wine during the interview […] because sometimes when you drink […] you get a little loose' (in Kashner 2014)).

Perhaps most notably, Lawrence is very vocal about her concerns regarding body image; displaying a consciousness about her influence on young women and girls, especially in terms of how her portrayal as Katniss may be considered as a role model for female audiences. In one interview situation Lawrence refused to respond to questions about her weight: 'Why do you want to discuss my weight? […] Would you feel comfortable if I asked you about how much you weigh?' (in Walden 2013). In response to criticism following the release of the first *Hunger Games* film, arguing that her 'womanly figure' is 'a bad fit' for a dystopian world where people are supposedly starving (Scott and Dargis 2012), Lawrence spoke to BBC's *Newsnight* about her ethical decisions to "control this image that young girls are going to be seeing" (in BBC 2013). It is better to look "strong and healthy", she states, rather than perpetuating "unrealistic expectations" that girls may fail to imitate (in BBC 2013).

Of course, there is a glaring irony to glossy spreads in magazines like *Harpers Bazaar*, which include quotes from Lawrence consciously denouncing her body type as 'normal' (''I don't feel like I have a normal body.' I do Pilates every day. I eat, but I work out a lot more than a normal person'), while simultaneously featuring images of the star modelling Dior Haute Couture clothing, price available 'upon request' (in Brown 2016). '[B]oth progressive but also consummately and reassuringly feminine', this ironic display is an element of what McRobbie terms as the 'new sexual contract', whereby feminist politics is replaced and such 'displacement' is rewarded by new sexual freedoms and increased agency in consumer and labour markets (2009: 57). Further, in her formulation of the 'post-feminist masquerade', McRobbie argues that male structures of power are kept in

place via fashion and beauty systems, requiring constant self-judgement and self-beratement on behalf of the female subject against rigid cultural norms (2009: 68).

As part of this masquerade, so as not to appear threatening to men, women arguably conceal their power by performing a desirable, 're-assuring femininity' in the name of personal choice and empowerment (McRobbie 2009: 68-9). Lawrence's star image adheres to this 'prescriptive feminine agency' (McRobbie 2009: 57) to some degree, as she seemingly delights in the capacity of success and enjoyment that it affords her. Talking of her marketing campaigns with Dior, she states: 'They fly me to Paris and get me hotel rooms […] I couldn't renew my contract quick enough' (in Brown 2016). Indeed, as a celebrity ambassador for Dior, Lawrence's 'real beauty' (Brown 2016) is thus aligned with the corporate branding of the fashion house, whose products and ethics have been called into question for promoting unrealistic body image standards for women.[20]

In her influential work, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* ([1993] 2003), Susan Bordo argues that such self-regulating disciplines of diet, make-up, and dress are normalised on the female body in the pursuit of a homogenised ideal of femininity ([1993] 2003: 166). Through these practices, she argues, 'we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction of lack, of insufficiency, of never being good enough' (Bordo [1993] 2003: 166). Bordo also understands disorders such as anorexia and bulimia as 'complex crystallizations of culture'; obsessions that are fostered by mediated constructions of the body ([1993] 2003: 35). More recent feminist scholarship continues to emphasise femininity as a bodily property and the increased labour that is required of women to manage their appearance and subjectivity in a postfeminist, neoliberal culture (Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b, Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008, McRobbie 2009, Negra 2009, Gill and Scharff 2011, Holmes and Negra 2011, Tincknell 2011, McRobbie 2015, Gill and Orgad 2015, Elias et al. 2017). Holmes and Negra identify the body as the principal focus in discourses surrounding female celebrity (2011: 7), while Allen notes its centrality in the construction of the "authentic" self (2011: 151).

[20] See Sauers (2010) and Akbareian (2015).

Situating Lawrence within this postfeminist system, Kanai's (2015) analysis skilfully draws attention to the increased work that young female celebrities must perform on themselves to maintain this pleasing form of feminine individuality. The main premise of Kanai's reading is that such labour is effaced through Lawrence's employment of affective practices such as humour, fun, and accessibility; serving to demonstrate important postfeminist qualities:

> [F]irst, one's authenticity, as one distances oneself from the feminine artifice of being 'perfect' and 'polished'; and second, that one is 'fun' and 'up for it' because one does not take life 'too seriously'. Through this form of humour, one may point to one's problems (or indeed, produce them) in a way that minimises the emotional labour required of others; indeed, in a way that performs accessibility for others. (Kanai 2015: 334)

Drawing on similar accounts of female celebrity identity work (Allen 2011, Keller 2014, Petersen 2014), Kanai argues that Lawrence's performance of hegemonic femininity appears naturalised on her conventional body. Although it is understood that labour is clearly involved in moulding the female body to maintain this ideal, it must remain invisible so that the performance can be deemed 'authentic' (Weber 2009, Allen 2011, Keller 2014). As Jessalynn Marie Keller notes, 'female celebrities that appear too contrived, artificial, or phony, especially if it manifests on their bodies through exaggerated plastic surgery for example, are often publicly ridiculed for trying too hard and "not being themselves"' (2014: 150). It is here, however, that I wish to question the extent to which Lawrence's performance of femininity appears altogether natural and wholly a product of the star's affective labour.

Lawrence's entrance on *The Tonight Show*, for instance, immediately draws attention to the artificiality of her hair extensions and comments explicitly on how such a detail is the subject of intense media surveillance. Further, when questioned by Fallon about the amount of time required for the hair and make-up process for her role as the 'blue' mutant Mystique in the *X-Men* franchise, Lawrence's reply employs a sarcastic humour that highlights the *unnaturalness* of this labour: "It used to take eight [hours], which is lovely […] now it only takes three. […] I stood or I had to sit on a bicycle seat, which every woman knows is our dream come true" (The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon

2014). Looking at the audience as she says this, Lawrence invites the women in the studio to identify with this seemingly gendered ordeal.

Elsewhere, during an interview on the red carpet preceding the Academy Awards in 2013, where she was awarded the Oscar for Best Actress, Lawrence is questioned about her choice of dress. When asked to comment on the different "pieces" that she is wearing, Lawrence responds flatly with some confusion: "Well I don't know the different pieces. This is the top and this is the bottom" (Oszko 2013). After being prompted by one of her assistants Lawrence begins to list the names of the different fashion designers responsible for her dress and accessories, which she must read from a small piece of paper from her handbag, as if reading from a script. Through her responses, here, Lawrence not only undermines the gendered questions that are typically aimed at female celebrities in these situations, but the star appears inexpert, or indeed, bored with such matters. In an attempt to steer the interview along these conventional lines, the star is asked to "take a step back" (Oszko 2013) as if to make a spectacle of her dress to the camera. Such an approach is undercut by Lawrence's unenthusiastic demeanour and body language, rendering the interviewer's reference to the star as "the talk of the town when it comes to fashion" (Oszko 2013) noticeably ironic.

After she had fallen ascending the stairs to accept her Oscar that same year, Lawrence answered questions from the press backstage in a similar manner. Rather than indulge their attempts to build a spectacular narrative around such things like how she prepared for the day, whether her success has come too soon in her career, and how she managed to fall, Lawrence's responses are comic but short and to the point: "What do you mean, what happened? Look at my dress! I tried to walk up the stairs in this dress" (CNN 2013). Such a response highlights the seeming absurdity or even pointlessness inherent in such questioning. During this interaction with the press, the star also makes reference to her feelings of stress and hunger before the ceremony, the swift shot of alcohol she consumed before going backstage, and rather controversially raises her middle finger to journalists in the press room. Indeed, such behaviour can be interpreted as part of Lawrence's humorous affective labour, displaying a 'winning unaffectedness which

strategically underplays her star power' (Kanai 2015: 334). Of course, there is a level of subversiveness to Lawrence's off-screen persona that seeks to draw attention to certain postfeminist logics but rather than simply conforming to these logics and erasing the affective labour involved (Kanai 2015: 330), I would suggest that the star is simultaneously drawing attention to and unpicking these logics as part of her performance. In so doing, Lawrence calls into question the legitimacy of the work required of her and, by extension, other young women, in maintaining vigilance about their feminine appearance and demeanour.

Since her now famous fall at the Oscars, there have followed other well-documented stumbles and fashion-related mishaps at prestigious events. These include the fall to her knees on the pre-show red carpet at the Oscars in 2014 and her awkward approach to the stage at the 2013 Screen Actors Guild Awards, where the train of her Christian Dior gown causes the actor to stumble and reveal some of the under-layers of sheer material. Other incidents involving haute couture attire not caught on camera but self-confessed by Lawrence, include the time she introduced herself to established director Francis Ford Coppola at a restaurant in Paris, while unbeknownst to the star, her Tom Ford dress was unzipped at the back, thus exposing her underwear. Lawrence also reveals how she stumbled on her dress upon her entrance to a talk show of which she refuses to name, specifically after telling producers of the show that she did not wish to talk about her clumsiness as part of the interview, in fear of audiences interpreting such behaviour as a gimmick. Lawrence also admits that she instructed the trip to be edited out of the televised broadcast. Indeed, as already discussed, this aspect of Lawrence's star image continues to stimulate media fascination with regard to the legitimacy of her performance (see Murphy 2016, for example). I wish to highlight, however, that Lawrence's seeming ineptness with feminine fashions can be seen to predate her breakthrough fame.

In this post (Figure 2.3) by a Tumblr blogger, Lawrence can be seen struggling with her pewter strapless gown on the red carpet at the 2008 Venice International Film Festival in Italy. Winning the Premio Marcello Mastroianni Award for Best Emerging Actress for her film debut as Mariana in *The Burning Plain* (2008), such critical recognition came before

her role in the independent drama film *Winter's Bone* (2010), which was thought to contribute significantly to the acceleration of her film career. The caption added to the images by the blogger in this example, implies that Lawrence's difficulty with fashionable dresses has been a recognisable feature of her off-screen performance even before it was considered part of her 'repertoire' as a high-profile actor in Hollywood. As Kanai suggests, such content by bloggers appears to demonstrate their heightened awareness of the 'postfeminist rules' regulating contemporary feminine subjectivity (2015: 331). But rather than constructing Lawrence's 'divergence from a life script' (Kanai 2015: 331) through her failure to perform femininity naturally, this particular example can arguably be seen to identify and reproduce what is already a consistent and "authentic" part of the star's celebrity life script.

Figure 2.3. 'Jennifer Lawrence struggling with dresses since 2008.' jenniferlawrenceupdated.tumblr.com.

When traced back to Lawrence's formative years, her noticeable traits that complicate her performance of femininity arguably appear as part of a natural progression. As Dyer (1979) notes, it is this continuity between a star's public and private self that holds

the key to their authenticity. Furthermore, as Littler states, a celebrity's authenticity is partly contained in reference to their 'legitimate 'moment before' fame' and it is the aspirational subjectivity behind wanting to be a star 'that is coded as being 'real'' (2003: 13). Fame is 'normalised' or made to seem achievable through this framing; the idea of intimacy is sold through the ways that celebrities are presented as 'just like us' in their aspirations, 'keeping it real' via their reflections on what it was like before they were famous (Littler 2003: 13-4). Lawrence's Southern roots are purported to contribute significantly to her 'Cool Girl' authenticity: 'She grew up in Kentucky on a broad swath of land, where, as the kid sister to two older brothers, she spent a lot of time fishing and tomboying around […] and […] she played on the all-boys basketball team' (Petersen 2014). As Allen notes, a woman's authenticity or 'ordinariness' is always located in the body, thus a natural-looking, goofy, unpretentious performance is read as 'more real' than a 'hyper-feminine', 'hyper-heterosexualized' display (2011: 168). Indeed, it could be argued that Lawrence is 'staying true to herself' and where she came from (Allen 2011: 166-67). Wrestling with her male co-stars on-set and photobombing Sarah Jessica Parker on the red carpet, then, could be examples of Lawrence simply acting out what is most natural to her.

Of course, such tomboy attributes are seemingly legitimated via Lawrence's light-hearted appeal and sexually coded body. Kanai argues that Lawrence's navigation of Hochschild's (1983) 'feeling rules' of postfeminist subjectivity allow certain forms of transgression to be enactable (2015: 332). Effectively 'containing' emotional labour that may be deemed as excessive, such as bitterness or feminine meanness, Kanai continues, Lawrence 'seamlessly walks the line between being a 'man's woman' and a 'girl's girl'' (2015: 336). In this sense Lawrence's swearing, her openness about indecorous subject matter, and her casual competition with other female stars (seen when she jokingly attempted to steal Lupita Nyong'o's Best Actress Oscar in 2014 or playfully covering Emma Watson's face with her hand while the two posed for photographs together at a Christian Dior show), is viewed as 'fun' and 'safe' and 'selectively boyish' without critiquing the privilege of men (Kanai 2015: 335-6). I argue, however, that while Lawrence's humour is compelling in terms of its purported authenticity and how it seems to conform to certain

postfeminist logics, these unpoliced aspects of the star's persona could be illustrative of her unawareness of such feeling rules, or moreover, that she simply does not care to abide by them. Indeed, as already discussed in relation to Lawrence's apparent 'falls from grace', the star's transgressions do not always appear to be 'safe'. Furthermore, when read against other constructed elements of her star image, she consistently draws attention to existing gender norms in order to question them.

In her article written for feminist online newsletter *Lenny Letter*, for example, Lawrence does not hide the fact that she is angry and explicitly sets out to critique the privilege of men: 'I'm over trying to find the "adorable" way to state my opinion and still be likeable! Fuck that' (Lawrence 2015). Addressing the gender disparities of pay in Hollywood following revelations from the Sony Pictures hack [21] that she had earned considerably less than her male co-stars for her part in *American Hustle* (2013) (see Needham 2014), Lawrence confesses that 'there was an element of wanting to be liked' and not deemed to be '"difficult" or "spoiled"' that partly influenced her decision to settle for a lower salary 'than the lucky people with dicks' (Lawrence 2015). Although the essay does exhibit Lawrence's familiar self-deprecating tone to somewhat assuage the intent behind her criticism ('I didn't want to keep fighting over millions of dollars that, frankly, due to two franchises, I don't need. (I told you it wasn't relatable, don't hate me)' (Lawrence 2015)), the expression of her anger is significant as it is rarely witnessed as part of her off-screen persona. Such displays of female emotional 'excess' (Nunn and Biressi 2010, Kanai 2015), although written rather than spoken here, add to the already overt political resonance of the piece. Lawrence's association with feminism still remains only implied here ('When it comes to the subject of feminism, I've remained ever-so-slightly quiet. I don't like joining conversations that feel like they're "trending"' (Lawrence 2015)), but her words forcefully decry the gender disparities in a patriarchal industry and such abuse of power by men.

[21] In November, 2014 so-called hacker group 'Guardians of Peace' leaked confidential data from Sony Pictures, which included confidential emails, personal information about employees, and executive salary figures.

Lawrence spoke in a similar manner following the iCloud leaks in August, 2014. Nude photographs of the star and various other celebrities, mostly women, were obtained from Apple's iCloud platform and disseminated online. In an exclusive interview for *Vanity Fair* Lawrence vehemently rebuked not only those behind the hacking but anyone responsible for looking at the images and sharing them: 'Anybody who looked at those pictures, you're perpetuating a sexual offense. You should cower with shame, […] I didn't tell you that you could look at my naked body' (in Kashner 2014). Lawrence's refusal to apologise ('I don't have anything to say I'm sorry for' (in Kashner 2014)) along with her judgement of the hackers and their intermediaries, seemingly subverts the intended humiliating affects of such an act.

Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, who argues that shame is 'an emotion which requires a witness' (2004: 105-6), Nunn and Biressi note that celebrities must be able to deliver an expression of damage, regret, and shame in order to publicly recoup their injured persona following a scandal (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 58). In her refusal to talk about this incident in public and by refuting its status as mere 'scandal' ('It is a sexual violation' (in Kashner 2014)), it can be argued that Lawrence refuses to comply with the emotion work that is necessary to fulfil this contract of intimacy with the public (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 58). This seemingly calls into question her status as 'girlfriend material' purported through her apparent accessibility (Kanai 2015: 335). Yes, this key aspect of Lawrence's star image is bound up in the way that 'her A-list star status is invoked yet downplayed' (Kanai 2015: 335), but here such meanings about her 'realness' have a different inflection:

> Just because I'm a public figure, just because I'm an actress, does not mean that I asked for this. It does not mean that it comes with the territory. It's my body, and it should be my choice, and the fact that it is not my choice is absolutely disgusting. I can't believe that we even live in that kind of world. People forget that we're human. (Lawrence in Kashner 2014)

Lawrence's impassioned vindication speaks directly to what Sarah Projansky refers to as 'the intense publicness of contemporary girlhood: the way in which girls are readily available to us, similar to the way every aspect of a celebrity's life is fair game for discussion, evaluation, and consumption' (Projansky 2014: 7). As Projansky argues, this

'spectacularization' of female identity is made legible in public through discourses of celebrity (Projansky 2014: 6), as images, videos, and other media featuring young women are manifest in a pervasive and 'highly-convergent media environment' wherein 'the manufacture of and trade in celebrity has become a commercial strategy' (Turner 2004: 9). Lawrence's anger at celebrity blogger Perez Hilton for temporarily posting the photographs on his gossip website (tmz.com) (in Kashner 2014), calls attention to the incessant paparazzism and 'circling capacities' of the Internet that further intensify a corporeal, 'sexual' surveillance of women (Holmes and Negra 2011: 7). Although, as Holmes and Negra note, the Internet may not have meant a change in the kinds of celebrity content, the considerable expansion of digital channels has made circulation practices transnational, thus 'the increasing erosion of the boundary between public/private in the construction of the famous, and […] the judgement and punishment dynamics which shape the mediation of many contemporary celebrities appear ambient' (2008: 14).

Lawrence identifies her privacy as a 'full-time job' and something that she must work hard to maintain (in Miller 2016). Viewing privacy as a form of labour emphasises the incessant invasive practices inherent in an increasingly visual celebrity culture where 'visibility is equated with access' (Schwartz 2011: 225). A consistent part of Lawrence's star image is the way that she attempts to separate her sense of self from her public image. In her own words, Lawrence thinks of her public self as an avatar, a digital image that she offers to the public while arguably guarding her private self: 'You out there can have the avatar me. I can keep me' (in Barnes 2016b). As I have argued, Lawrence's off-screen persona constantly seeks to puncture this façade by drawing attention to the conditions that bolster such pretence. As part of this, Lawrence continues to vocalise her disgust for the omnipresence of paparazzi in her life, regardless of where she is or what she is doing: 'There are 10 men sleeping outside my house and I see them every morning and it's not lovely' (in Hiscock 2016). Lawrence's attempts to distance herself from these invasions has been noted by bloggers, who use candid images of the star, presumably obtained by paparazzi photographers, alongside appropriate quotations regarding this troubling part of her life in the spotlight.

Figure 2.4. ‘This is not normal’. effinwomen.tumblr.com.

The above image (Figure 2.4) is one such example where the blogger has spliced together a direct quote from Lawrence, taken from an interview in *W Magazine* (Hirschberg 2012) with an image capturing a paparazzi photographer following the star as she walks along a public sidewalk. The post is haunting in its depiction of Lawrence who appears isolated from the rest of the world despite being out in broad daylight. With her eyes concealed by large black sunglasses, presumably to disguise her face as well as to protect her from the sun, the photographer appears as a ghostly presence behind her on what appears to be an otherwise empty sidewalk. Of course, the person responsible for capturing this photograph could well be another member of the paparazzi, thus implying an even greater sense of their invasion of Lawrence’s existence.

The image aptly illustrates Lawrence's own summation of how her intense fame can sometimes feel: 'When people look at you differently and talk to you differently, like even just walking into an elevator, it's a very isolating feeling – they don't look at you like a person anymore. It's one of the most lonely, icy feelings in the world' (in Kashner 2014). The text overlaying the image ('THIS IS NOT NORMAL'), perhaps added by the same blogger, can be attributable to Lawrence despite not being a direct quote, as if imprinting this image of herself with Lawrence's own words. Through its appropriation in this context, spliced together with other media, the blogger has given the image a different resonance, as if reclaiming control on behalf of the star: 'I deserve the right to have control over my image. I would prefer that the only time somebody sees me is when I am in a film, or in character or if I am promoting a movie' (Lawrence in Hiscock 2016).

Lawrence's refusal to use any personalised social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram (aside from the official Facebook account seemingly controlled by her management) is not surprising given her wish to retain some semblance of a private life: 'that's more exposure – that's just more me […] I'm not trying to be a GIF. I'm not trying to be a picked-up-on-Twitter quote. All I'm trying to do is act' (in Hiscock 2016). This is, however, particularly significant in 'an era of *presentational culture*' (Marshall 2010: 38 [original emphasis]). As Marshall notes, new media has lead to an 'explosion in practices of online presentation' and thus a new type of individualism: 'a will to produce that formulates a shifted constitution of desire and a different connection to the contemporary moment' (2006b: 638). The star's resistance to engage with such online cultural practices and make herself accessible via this connection can arguably be read as an attempt to renegotiate the terms under which her body and public self are seen and consumed within the shifting power dynamics of such digital spaces. This presents a contrary position to a figure like Dunham, who readily utilises social media to enable and further her celebrity. While Lawrence (and indeed, Katniss) display some resistance towards these online modes of performance and the ways that these contribute to her 'seen-ness', Dunham is fully prepared to negotiate her own image within these mediated realms: indeed, she claims her 'looked-at-ness' for a particular purpose.

In her industrial analysis of the shifts in the paparazzi industry as a result of new media convergence, Kim McNamara argues that: 'it is undeniable that many paparazzi photographers have set out to disrupt the stable image of the celebrity as promoted by the publicist' (2011: 522). The globalization of paparazzi content, through its rapid distribution to magazines, television, and websites, has also meant that the everyday life of the celebrity functions as a performance in itself under the gaze of the paparazzi (Marshall 2010: 39). As Redmond notes, the gaze facilitated by the paparazzi can function as a way to investigate and explore a celebrity's authenticity (2014: 30), the 'real' person behind the image (Dyer 1986, Schwartz, 2011: 233). Indeed, as Redmond notes, this gaze can sometimes be a 'glimpse', a mere 'moment' that is captured and intensified by its fleetingness, its impermanence – notably in the 'frenzied moment' as a celebrity enters or exits a vehicle, a hotel, or restaurant (2014: 33).

Paparazzi photography featuring female celebrities, disseminated to tabloid magazines and celebrity gossip blogs, can work towards the intense surveillance and policing of the female body, pinpointing signs of ageing, cosmetic surgery, and other imperfections that fall outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity (Holmes and Negra 2008, Fairclough 2008). In images of 'scandalous', crisis, or "trainwreck" celebrities like Britney Spears, for example, the body is publicly pilloried, flogged, branded, and essentially 'othered' via a more semiotic kind of punishment and 'torture' in the digital age (Watkins Fisher 2011: 316).[22] The 'crotch shot' paparazzi photograph, of which Spears has often been the subject, is a highly lucrative business, sometimes for the celebrity in question. However, as Margaret Schwartz argues, female genitalia and the concept of female celebrity are representative of a perceived 'lack' or 'emptiness' linked with male pleasure (2011: 239). In these captured 'heterosexist, patriarchal glimpses' the female celebrity is 'reduced to her biology, to pure sex, in the basest of ways' (Redmond 2014: 33). As Anja Hirdman notes, the exposure of the female celebrity body in gossip magazines has become increasingly 'visceral,' with the 'collaged presentation of body parts' and 'female flesh as a whole' arguably diminishing the individuality of the celebrity

[22] The author cites Foucault (1975: 33).

and encouraging a 'carnal mode of address' (2017: 2-5). In a similar vein to the makeover genre of television, femininity is pathologised through ritualised humiliation of the 'freakish' and 'carnivalesque', so as to 'maintain and normalize a particular set of sexual and gendered power relations' (Tincknell 2011: 88-9). Chapter 3 extends this discussion with reference to the ways in which Dunham uses her own public subjectivity across her creative projects in order to resist such notions of femininity as pathologised.

The tensions that can be observed in Lawrence's candid behaviour during such times of heightened paparazzi presence arguably dilute the effectiveness of such 'forensic detailing' (Hirdman 2017: 6) via this photography. For on the one hand, when pursued by photographers in public, Lawrence can be seen to respond with offensive gestures, verbal anger, or simply attempting to shield herself from their gaze – notably once using an umbrella, that when opened, displays a large image of an offensive hand gesture. On the other hand, Lawrence has been seen to engage with paparazzi in a more light-hearted manner by asking them to carry her luggage or directing unusual facial expressions at the camera, for example. At other times it is even as if Lawrence intentionally puts on a show for the slew of photographers awaiting her arrival or departure – most notably when the star had chopsticks hanging from her mouth as she left a restaurant in New York City, and alighting from a car with black ink drawn across her face in the style of a unibrow, moustache, and beard. While showing her irritation and repudiation towards the paparazzi on occasion, then, Lawrence also actively engages with their practices, arguably in an attempt to disrupt and subvert the voyeuristic, sexual gaze that they facilitate. Albeit using online practices that Lawrence refuses to utilise, Dunham's attempts to appropriate paparazzi images of herself as part of her social media output (discussed in Chapter 3) displays similar forms of work to negotiate the terms under which her body is mediated and looked at. Indeed, these stars seemingly recognise the transience of these moments and thus try to position themselves as somebody more authentic.

This authenticity is principally located in Lawrence's unique 'face-work' (Goffman 1959), which further projects her ambivalent feminine subjectivity. According to Goffman, social interaction requires verbal and nonverbal actions that are indicative of one's

particular point of view, with the term 'face' ultimately defining an image of effective self-delineation that carries positive social value (1972: 5). We tend to experience emotional responses to another's face; thus feelings are inherently attached to it relative to the particular situation and context (Goffman 1972: 6). The concept of 'face-work', then, refers to the management of these emotional interactions and responses – to give good face or 'save face' is to project the appropriate emotions and attitude during a given situation (Goffman 1972: 12-3). Goffman talks of 'poise' as an important example of face-work, as it means composure, dignity, even elegance, used perhaps to control embarrassment and the embarrassment of others (1972: 13). To say that Lawrence's face-work is unique may seem overreaching given that, as Goffman argues, face-saving practices are often part of a characteristic repertoire for certain individuals, subcultures, and societies (1972: 13). But when read against markers of conventional femininity and the ways in which this is often mediated in contemporary celebrity culture, Lawrence's animated expressions appear unusual and resistant to such gendered norms.

Roland Barthes' essay 'The Face of Garbo', in his seminal anthology *Mythologies* (1957), isolates the eminence of the female face in Hollywood cinema. With reference to Greta Garbo and her androgynous performance in *Queen Christina* (1933), Barthes notes the perfect, mask-like surface emphasised through heavily stylised make-up and lighting, which creates a beautiful but ambiguous, 'almost sexually undefined' face (2009: 61). Garbo's face, Barthes suggests, appears both attainable yet unattainable, mortal yet immortal:

> Garbo's face represents this fragile moment when the cinema is about to draw an existential from an essential beauty, when the archetype leans towards the fascination of mortal faces, when the clarity of the flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman. (Barthes 2009: 62)

Applying Barthes' work to Hollywood glamour photography, Henry Jenkins suggests that such imagery 'involves an erasure of the corporeal body, even as it makes the physical surfaces of the body glowingly visible', thus such an 'abstraction' and 'perfection' of the human form 'removes it from the realm of human experience' (2007: 131). Further, in this erasure of the body the star is isolated from the public (Jenkins 2007: 134). As part of her

star image, Lawrence carries such markers of physical perfection that, as a celebrity and idealised subject who functions across a range of fictional and factual texts, position her as both an object of desire and subject of a sexual enquiry and fascination (Redmond 2014: 28). But as discussed, Lawrence's star image also appeals to her 'humanness' behind this surface, albeit in a way that presents her as a somewhat ambiguous figure despite her own reservations about the accessibility of her persona. Her face, I argue, is key to this contradictory presentation.

Figure 2.5. 'Jennifer Lawrence -> the face of the rebellion'. hauntingmydreams.tumblr.com.

Lawrence's animated, almost cartoon-like facial expressions have become a significant strand of the plethora of digital content available on the Internet featuring the star. Still images, memes, and GIFs capture particular moments of Lawrence's performance, with such content recorded from television, film, or YouTube, which feature her on-screen work as well as her off-screen appearances, including candid footage by

'fans' and paparazzi. This content is commonly used as part of online listicles on pop-culture websites, which often explicitly cite the star's 'GIF-able' or 'meme-able' qualities (see, for example, Lindig 2015). Lawrence's facial gesticulations have also been the subject of *Vanity Fair*'s online 'Secret Talent Theatre' segment, in which the star uses mime to simulate the action of sewing thread to her top and bottom lip, pulling on them to contort her mouth (see Miller 2016) (which has also become a GIF in and of itself). Further to this, there is an abundance of blog and image platforms generating and hosting similar content, some of which focus explicitly on this part of Lawrence's physicality, such as the Tumblr account entitled 'facesofjenniferlawrence.tumblr.com.

As Kanai's analysis shows, online blogging platforms like Tumblr are key sites where celebrity images are rearticulated and circulated, sometimes formatted as a means of narrating the female selfhood of its users (2015: 325-6). Lawrence's star image has been used presumably because of its resonance with wider social meanings, particularly practices that can be understood as part of a 'postfeminist affective-discursive landscape' (Kanai 2015: 327). Rather than focusing on content where Lawrence's image as an actor is distinguished from her 'just like us' celebrity self (Kanai 2015: 330), however, the following examples spotlight instances where such a distinction is not met, thus allowing the more contradictory potential of Lawrence's work to be brought to the surface. In these image sets (Figure 2.5 and Figure 2.6), Lawrence's face is pictured in a number of candid situations, presumably by paparazzi photographers (Figure 2.5), and in character as Katniss in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Figure 2.6). Both examples are framed within the context of the films, using Katniss's symbolic identity – 'the face of the rebellion' – to anchor the ironic humour associated with Lawrence's expressive face. Using the caption to reference Katniss's rebellious character in order to frame Lawrence's goofy candid behaviour (Figure 2.5), the blogger not only appropriates the paparazzi images of the star 'being herself', but also emphasises through this new comparative inflection the dramatic difference between the apparently capable Katniss and the buffoonish Lawrence. This is reversed for the same ironic effect, by using stills from Lawrence's fictional performance (Figure 2.6) that illuminate recognisable markers of the actor's off-screen

persona within the context of her on-screen work, in order humorously to undercut Katniss's rebellious identity.

Figure 2.6. 'The Face Of The Rebellion'. um-outrocometa.tumblr.com.

As a meme – a replication of a sign or a set of signs that gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon (Shifman 2013: 365) – there are numerous other examples like this which draw on Lawrence's face as a means of affiliating her scripted and non-scripted performances. Strikingly different from the composed, elegant, and conventionally beautiful photographs of Lawrence on the covers of magazines and full-page Dior advertisements, this content recognises another layer of the star's identity work that appears to be consistent both on- and off-screen. Rather than an erasure of the corporeal body and the star as isolated from the public, as Jenkins (2007: 131-34) observes in glamour photography, this fan-work seemingly goes 'beyond the surface' of the image (Dyer 1986) and identifies an important element of Lawrence's bodily performance. It is perhaps the 'naturalness' of Lawrence's movements and expressions (Kanai 2015: 330) that readily adheres her to fans and bloggers. But what makes this work important, here, is how it mines Lawrence's star image in terms of how she appears across a range of media texts, drawing on its consistency in different contexts. Rather than appropriating her celebrity image as a form of female self-expression that seemingly aligns with postfeminist

narratives and gendered norms (Kanai 2015), the examples I have selected here marshal Lawrence's *own* unique self-expression within the context of a broader media environment.

As Dyer (1979) observes, the dichotomy of star versus character has always been part of the ideological work of the star phenomenon. Existing independent to their fictional appearances in film, as people, stars appear as more 'real' than their characters in stories; grounded in ideas such as the close-up being believed to reveal the soul of the star (Dyer 1998: 20). In this sense, Dyer suggests, the performance of the star in-character can be taken as revealing the personality of the star, while the very idea of the star image as a construction is seemingly disguised (1998: 20). Fan-work often uses animated images such as GIFs to further isolate this elision between Lawrence and Katniss. As Line Nybro Petersen observes, GIFs are used within particular fandoms in order to dissect, interpret, and speculate about the text in question (2014: 102).

Figure 2.7. Untitled GIF set. laurenmjaureguis.tumblr.com.

Memes and GIFs then become part of Lawrence's celebrity signification across multiple media platforms; examples of 'spreadable media' (Jenkins et al. 2013) that facilitate fans' mediated interactions (Hills 2016: 478), as well as the ideas associated with the text itself. As Jenkins notes, these 'rereadings' of a text help to 'sustain the emotional immediacy' that initially captured the attention of the fan/ blogger, and when shared with others these 'fannish interpretations' shift from individual to collective responses (2013: 77). This social interaction takes on a particular form within the Tumblr platform due to its specific media logic and affordances, meaning that certain ideas and phrases (such as those explored in relation to Lawrence above) become tied to specific images or GIFs (Nybro Petersen 2014: 97), thus contributing to what Jenkins defines as 'common intellectual enterprises and emotional investments' (2006: 27).

The above GIF set (Figure 2.7) is one example of a particular phenomenon within *The Hunger Games* fandom, which is referred to across multiple platforms as the 'elevator scene'. In this scene from *Catching Fire* Katniss, along with Peeta and Haymitch return to their quarters following the opening ceremonies of the Quarter Quell tournament. As they enter the elevator Johanna Mason (Jenna Malone), a tribute from District 7, slips through the doors just as they are about to close. Complaining angrily about her predictable attire designed by her own stylist, Johanna proceeds to undress in front of them, removing her dress completely after asking Peeta to assist her. Katniss is incredibly uncomfortable with this display of nudity as her facial expressions clearly evidence, even shooting Peeta a reproachful glare, as he obliges to pull down Johanna's zip. Johanna's sexual confidence appears playfully aggressive and threatening towards Katniss, as if attempting to mark her territory: "So what do you think, now that the whole world wants to sleep with you?" she asks. She then abruptly interrupts Katniss, who mistakenly thinks the question is directed to her: "I wasn't talking to you", Johanna retorts.

The above GIF set captures segments of Lawrence's face-work, which is further emphasised, and *intensified*, through the closeness of the camera and the slow, repeated motion contained in each GIF. As Mary Ann Doane notes, the face is mostly theorised in terms of an opposition between surface and depth; bound up with a promise of something

beyond the image: 'It is barely possible to see a close-up of a face without asking: what is he/she thinking, feeling, suffering? What is happening beyond what I can see?' (2003: 96-7). Further, the face offers a universal language of signification (Doane 2003: 97); evident in the ways that a large amount of fan-work produces similar patterns of visual content centred on this particular aspect of Lawrence's performance. Although perhaps not disrupting the temporal unfolding of the narrative of *Catching Fire* (Doane 2003: 97-8) during the elevator scene, when extracted from this context by bloggers using GIFs, the continuous looping of Lawrence's facial expressions means that such moments are no longer ephemeral and can be viewed indefinitely. Indeed, when several GIFs are put together (Figure 2.7), they form a 'comic book-style' narrative of their own (Nybro Petersen 2014: 90). The soundless, slow movement of these GIFs, too, carry a different temporality to their original viewing context. As Doane argues, 'the face speaks to us so much more eloquently when mute' (2013: 97).

An abundance of other variations of this scene exist on Tumblr, which splice together GIFs and/ or still images that offer other interesting inflections. Taking two still images from this scene, one blogger frames the set with the caption, 'Hey Katniss, your Jennifer is showing.' [23] Here, the blogger identifies the face-work as attributable to Lawrence as opposed to her character Katniss, conveying the potency of this performance and how this is drawn out through close reading of *The Hunger Games* films. Further, the gentle sarcasm expressed by the informal greeting ('Hey Katniss') speaks to the emotional para-social identifications which may be associated with Lawrence and her fictional character in that the casual tone is suggestive of a 'personal acquaintance' with the star (Giles 2002: 289). As Matt Hills notes, no longer carrying the same pathologising connotations of 'social/psychological lack' which have typically been associated with fans of celebrity, recent scholarship seeks to revalue fan-celebrity interactions as part of normative media culture (2016: 463) (see, for example, Jensen 1992, Jenkins 2013, Hills 2002). Redmond's concept of 'celebaesthetic' illustrates the importance of the affective

[23] Available at: http://rawritstasha12.tumblr.com/post/80527541455/hey-katniss-your-jennifer-is-showing, accessed 9 March, 2017.

qualities of such a relationship, suggesting that communications between stars and their fans culminate 'in and through the activation of powerful emotions and senses' (Redmond 2014: 13-4). A major component of the emotional labour expended by stars and celebrities is increasingly enacted via online social media (Marshall 2010, Marwick and boyd 2011, Hills 2016); necessary to construct their public selves and to maintain a relationship with audiences and a public.

Marshall defines a celebrity's implication into the 'interpersonal flow of communication' via social media networking as enacting a 'parasocial self', engaging with and presenting themselves to the mass public – a labour that was once principally organised 'by the ancillary press of the celebrity industry' (2010: 43). Indeed, this online presentation acts as another channel of enquiry – as celebrity gossip once did in the twentieth century – through which to search for the 'real', authentic self: 'Fans continue to try to strip away the veneers of performance and publicity to find these true versions of celebrities, and the on-line world constructs the parasocial interpersonal pathways for an apparent intensified connection' (Marshall 2010: 44). Like other high-profile 'superstars' without an authorised presence on platforms like Twitter, such as Julia Roberts, Angelina Jolie, and Keira Knightley (Marwick and boyd 2011, Thomas 2014b), in this way, Lawrence seems to maintain an 'aura of distance'; appearing 'elusive and extraordinary, 'knowable' only through gossip and traditional mediation' (Thomas 2014b: 245). Despite the absence of a 'parasocial self' that Lawrence herself has constructed via online social networks, an 'emotional closeness' (Hills 2016) can still be observed in the fan-work relating to the star and *The Hunger Games* texts.

These fannish practices, seemingly motivated by affect – producing, creating, and sharing content (images, commentary, videos, screen shots, GIFs, etc.) – 'permeate the Internet' (De Kosnik 2013: 98); marking 'an era of blurring boundaries between interpersonal and mass, professional and amateur, bottom-up and top-down communications' (Schifman 2013: 363). Defined as active production and a category of work (De Kosnik 2013), the creative activities of fan production can be understood under the terms of what Tiziana Terranova calls 'free labor':

> [A]n important, and yet undervalued, force in advanced capitalist societies […] Far from being an "unreal", empty space, the Internet is animated by cultural and technical labor…a continuous production of value which is completely immanent to the flows of the network society at large. (Terranova 2000: 33-4)

Applying the work of Dick Hebdige from his landmark book *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979), Abigail De Kosnik (2013) suggests that fan labour articulates similar practices of free labour performed by subcultural groups. In efforts to 'mark their difference from other groups' the work of subcultures involves 'meaning-making' and 'recontextualizing commodities as crucial components of their performance […] which often stands in clear opposition to societal norms' (De Kosnik 2013: 100). Similarly, '[f]ans act upon commodities and imbue them with worth via their performances, which consist of displays of certain expressions and specific actions' (De Kosnik 2013: 100). Ironically, as De Kosnik points out, this work also increases the market value and appeal of commodities; thus conforming to a capitalist regime (2013: 100-01).

Like *The Hunger Games* franchise itself, then, the labour of fandom displays an inherent contradiction within the capitalist economy. As Hills notes: 'Fans are, in one sense, "ideal consumers" since their consumption habits can be very highly predicted by the culture industry […] But fans also express anti-commercial beliefs […] or "ideologies" […] since these beliefs are not entirely in alignment with the cultural situation in which fans find themselves' (2002: 29). As Hills goes on to argue, however, fans extend and redefine the value of texts through their appropriations; adding to them in ways that are measured by their lived experience (2002: 35). As De Kosnik writes, fannish practices and interests in specific things are underpinned by an emotional, intellectual, psychological, or artistic connection to the source, which infuse commodities with 'nonnormative meanings' in order to reject 'capitalism's proclivity for treating everybody as exactly the same […] reducing all to equivalent, interchangeable consumers' (2013: 108-09). In other words, fans can be seen to be 'operating in the shadows of commercial culture'; occupying a space that is 'defined by its refusal of mundane values and practices, its celebration of deeply held emotions and passionately embraced pleasures' (Jenkins 2013: 257, 283). From the small selection of fan-work I have drawn on here, these affective connections

are invested in the ambiguities of Lawrence's performance and how these are read in relation to *The Hunger Games*.

Motivated by the same emotional connections and inherent pleasures that Collins's work deems so powerful, this fan-work highlights the same affective capacity as is visible in Lawrence's performances. Rather than merely mobilising celebrity images as a form of their own self-expression and awareness of postfeminist regulatory strictures of femininity (Kanai 2015), this fan-work seeks out those small but significant moments in Lawrence's performance that carry potential to rupture hegemonic narratives. Imbued with feeling, this labour has a collective, 'political' register (Fisher 2013). Of course, the collective love for the franchise itself has also inspired political activism by fans, most notably in campaigns launched by 'The Harry Potter Alliance'; a non-profit organisation founded in 2005 working to engage charitable action on issues effecting equality, human rights, and literacy. Leveraging the incredible success and popularity of *The Hunger Games* franchise, the HPA coordinated a number of campaigns which involved food drives in association with Oxfam and hijacking Lionsgate's social media marketing campaign for the *Catching Fire* film with images of the three-fingered salute accompanied by narratives about economic equality in the daily lives of individuals.[24] As Hassler-Forest notes, fan communities were able to appropriate the storyworld's own visual and rhetorical language and mobilise existing networks to engage in collective activism that aimed to critique real-world forms of social and economic inequality (2016: 146-47). Furthermore, from within the franchise itself, one that contains contradictory allegorical meanings, this activism foregrounded an interpretative perspective on *The Hunger Games*' storyworld that emphasises its anti-capitalist resonance (Hassler-Forest 2016: 146). These competitive interpretive readings by fans, in whatever form they take, harness the political potential that is there to be found in these phenomenal texts, despite the criticisms levelled at them.

[24] See the organisation's website at: http://thehpalliance.org.

Conclusion

For all of the conceptual questions that I have drawn attention to, here, this chapter has not necessarily provided answers but sought to pick out the ambiguities in the politics of these texts. *The Hunger Games* in its filmic form presents a phenomenal media spectacle that is both complicit with and bounded by the same on-going system of commodity capitalism that Collins's work sought to critique. The transmedia construction of its storyworld far exceeds what Vivienne Muller (2012) identifies in the novels as the telling of the 'virtually real'. Through their elaborate use of the virtual entertainment modality, the novels risk compromising 'the ethical freight' carried by Katniss, by frustrating attempts at critical distance 'to the point where it is difficult to identify and engage productively with the actual to which they refer' (Muller 2012: 52). In other words, the novels present 'a simulacrum that eventually fails to move beyond its own terms of reference' (Muller 2012: 62). This ideological quandary is brought into dazzling effect via the visualisation of this postmodern condition in the filmic adaptations; appropriating key conventions of reality TV, popular news and entertainment forms as a means of blurring boundaries to the point where existing conceptual frameworks seem redundant in their explication of such phenomena. And as I have argued, here, such moments of uncertainty and ambiguity, where the films' form and aesthetics seemingly cloud their moral message, are problematic but are prerequisite in order to fully understand their affective and symbolic power. Emotion and feeling are at the core of this franchise – adding to, rather than diminishing its political charge.

The focus of this chapter was to elaborate on the importance of the films' affective pull; a quality of these texts that has often been acknowledged (Fisher 2013, Hassler-Forest 2016) but not in terms that have sought to explicate the impact of feelings and emotion on our understandings of these stories and their politics. The precariousness and contingency of Katniss Everdeen's life and identity within a contemporary mediated landscape defined by exploitative and immaterial labour, class conflict, and ruthless individualism, is paralleled by Jennifer Lawrence's own extratextual persona. In and of

itself, Lawrence's star image illustrates the complexities of the current moment; namely how to represent authenticity in a world where authenticity itself is predicated on the presence of a camera. But when considered alongside Katniss's trepid negotiations between her inner self and her public identity as celebrity and rebel symbol, Lawrence's self-reflexive persona, drawing attention to and unpicking the gendered work required of female stars in postfeminist media culture, imbues Collins's critique with a sharper resonance. This is similar to how Fisher refers to the affects of the transmedia marketing for *Catching Fire*: working to extend the simulation of the films' storyworld but in a way that decodes dominant social reality through a 'contagious self-reflexivity' (2013). Lawrence's charisma, quirkiness, her relatable, yet guarded aura – to use Fisher's words, 'bleeds out' from her celebrity image (2013), but in ways that can be felt; thus bringing further into focus the value and power of the emotional and affective regimes of popular media forms that are central to Collins's stories.

As both Hassler-Forest (2016) and Fisher (2013) note, *The Hunger Games*' storyworld is the site of poignant ideological resonance which offers a helpful reminder of who the enemy is in the age of postdemocratic capitalism, as well as reinforcing the political potential of its message of solidarity: 'Could it be that Collins's novels are not only in tune with our actually existing but disintegrating neoliberal dystopia, but also with the world that will replace it?' (Fisher 2012: 33). The 'irrepressibly radical undercurrent' identified in these texts (Hassler-Forest 2016: 149) is also mirrored by fans, who, as I have shown in this chapter, draw out the ambiguities in Lawrence's on-screen performances and wider star image – in effect highlighting the gendered labour underpinning the capitalist system. This close reading by fans not only shows a deep love and knowledge of the source, but also an acknowledgement of the ways in which Lawrence extends the political resonance of these texts.

CHAPTER 3

‘Doing Her Best With What She’s Got’: Authorship, Irony, and Mediating Feminist Identities in Lena Dunham’s *Girls*

> ‘If feminism has to become a brand in order to fully engulf our culture and make change, I’m not complaining.’ (Dunham in Clark 2014)

Lena Dunham and her *Girls* have come of age in a time defined by and through postfeminism but like the other representations of girlhood already examined here, this text complicates certain understandings of this term. Sean Fuller and Catherine Driscoll provide a useful formulation of postfeminism as ‘a productive irritation that helps keep feminist discourse alive in contemporary culture’ (2015: 253). A concept that seemingly evades precise definition through its ‘messy’, contradictory politics and entanglements, it is precisely this ambiguity, argue Fuller and Driscoll, that justifies the usefulness of postfeminism to discussions about *Girls* (2015: 253). Airing on HBO between 2012 and 2017, the series follows the lives of four twenty-something girls living in the Brooklyn borough of New York City, with its six seasons exploring the trials and tribulations of millennial life in post-recession America. As this context suggests, the series focuses on the various struggles and contradictions of this life as the group of friends attempt to navigate what is an uncertain future in the years subsequent to their graduation from university. For the girls in *Girls* – Hannah Horvath (Dunham), Marnie Michaels (Allison Williams), Shoshanna Shapiro (Zosia Mamet), and Jessa Johansson (Jemima Kirke) – their experiences of life, love, sex, work, and friendship are never straightforward.

Postfeminism is necessary to any understanding of *Girls*: both as a contextual frame, and as a lens through which to mine the contradictions of millennial girlhood. Both popular and academic discourses surrounding the series have foregrounded the importance of postfeminism, even at a time when the very salience of the term is up for debate (see Gill 2016a, Gill 2016b). In her oft-cited essay, Imelda Whelehan articulates her ‘boredom’ and ‘ennui’ when analysing postfeminism and its many tedious applications in popular culture (2010: 159). For Whelehan, *Girls* breaks this mould, ultimately defying

characterisation as 'one more quality postfeminist text' by planting 'an elusive surface reading which is critiqued and progressively undermined' by its representational strategies – strategies that are intended to 'rupture and dislocate seamless viewing pleasure' (2017: 31-3). In a similar vein, Debra Ferreday sees the series (specifically its depictions of sex and violence) as part of a broader media culture which 'embodies a sensibility that is grittier and more ambivalent than the shiny-happy aesthetic of postfeminism' (2015a). As discussed in Chapter 1 in relation to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009, 2011), this grittiness is not unique to *Girls*, but the series does offer a distinctively messy articulation of postfeminist politics. In their comparative analysis, drawing on one of its formative cultural postfeminist texts, HBO's *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), Meredith Nash and Ruby Grant argue that '*Girls* allows for a re-articulation and re-mobilisation of post-feminism for a millennial generation' (2015: 977). In these readings and in those that I draw on throughout this analysis, current understandings of postfeminism are being stretched, tried, and transformed. Indeed, as has been unpacked in the introduction to this thesis, the messiness of postfeminism as it is articulated across all three case studies, can be read as productive – a means of 'working it through' in order to get to a place that is more positive in relation to feminism. It is the gendered labour involved in such a process that shall be the focus of this chapter. Like the previous two case studies, however, articulations of this messiness provoke complex questions, not only about feminism, but about authorship, the self, about representation, and about the raced and classed privileges that are bound up with this.

The intensity of the discussions and conversations that *Girls* has, and continues to precipitate, helps mark the series as one of the most important contemporary representations of gender to appear on television. Like Lisbeth Salander and Katniss Everdeen, the characters in this series are distinctive amidst a landscape of other popular texts depicting girlhoods, which, in part, is a result of the controversies and convoluted politics that their mediated identities engender and make visible. *Girls* prompted a multitude of responses in different media spaces about a myriad of representational issues relating to female experience; namely sex, sexuality, body image, reproductive

rights, and femininity. But it is the issue of race that has driven the main thrust of critical discourse about the series. *Girls* was hailed by some cultural commentators as no less than 'a gift' in terms of its 'raw' – 'real' – look at millennial life (Nussbaum 2012). For others, a series which centred on four white, middle-class, heterosexual women offered nothing more than a disappointing reminder of the 'indifferent', 'homogenous world' that is often depicted on screen, wherein people of colour are consistently overlooked (Stewart 2012). Thus, the crux of the controversy underpinning *Girls* is that its attempts to trouble expectations inherent in postfeminist representations are served within the same problematically narrow demographic that is often found to be a source of contention in postfeminist texts.

A defining element of the current postfeminist media landscape is what Jessica Ford (2016) identifies as the new 'girl cycle' of American cable and network television series, which includes titles such as *New Girl* (2012-), *The Mindy Project* (2013-), and *Broad City* (2014-). Amidst this plethora of girl-related content, *Girls* emerged as the 'flagship' series in this cycle, receiving the most critical attention and becoming central to discussions of contemporary television – and popular feminisms (Ford 2016: 1029-30). The series has received several accolades, including the Golden Globe for Best Television Series – Comedy or Musical, with Dunham herself winning the Golden Globe for Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series – Comedy or Musical, both in 2013. Even before its release, *Girls* became 'a catalyst for conversation' (Woods 2013), celebrated for all that it was but perhaps more significantly, severely criticised for all that it was not. These conversations even became 'a thing' in and of themselves; proving to be a prime example of how television is made complex through this kind of fervent discourse (Woods 2013). What and whom *Girls* did not represent and the accumulative impact of these discussions have continued to reverberate since its arrival, arguably helping to carve out the series' significance in a media culture wherein the meanings of feminism are ubiquitous and convoluted. Similar to what drives conversations surrounding feminism in popular media more broadly, it is often what is *missing* from these representations that encourages and provokes conversation.

Girls has become a touchstone text as a result of both its feminist – and not-so-feminist – credentials. Despite *Girls*' obvious failings, it is no doubt a series wherein 'feminism refuses to recede into the past'; ultimately telling 'a story about girls who are both the products *and* subjects of feminism' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 261 [original emphasis]). Responding to these tensions, Nash and Whelehan argue that the challenging representations in *Girls* give scholars 'pause for thought' and compells us to ask: 'are these merely unlikeable hipster slackers, or is there a cogent socio-political argument underpinning this 'dramedy'?' (2017: 1). Katherine Bell's intervention published as part of the special edition of *Feminist Media Studies* dedicated to the series, persuasively tenders that our analyses should look beyond the 'glib observations and revelations' made by Hannah and the rest of her self-entitled friends: 'While it is indisputable that more diversity would enrich and enhance *Girls*, we miss the mark if we fail to note how discourses of postfeminism and privilege are called up in the show largely to be scrutinized' (2013: 363). Indeed, instances of postfeminist entitlement are rife in *Girls*. In the opening scene of the very first episode, we are introduced to Hannah as she bemoans the decision of her parents to cut her off financially. Having already made the most of the luxurious meal that they will inevitably be paying for, Hannah brazenly rejects their decision to stop supporting her while she works as an unpaid intern, claiming that this is what they should want for her: "I am so close to the life that I want, the life that you want for me" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot').

Lauren J. DeCarvalho argues that rather than acknowledging the privileges and opportunities fought for by second wave feminists, 'Hannah tries to maneuver and manipulate her way toward success in lieu of simply working hard toward it' (2013: 368). But as has been observed elsewhere, the scripting in *Girls* simultaneously embraces and mocks this entitled position. Hannah's somewhat delusional and apathetic (albeit drug-induced) proclamation made later in the same episode – that she "may be the voice of my generation" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot') – is a seemingly satirical nod to the media's inevitable appropriation of the term in relation to Dunham herself. In this sense, *Girls* actively invokes the high expectations set by the media about a woman-centred series in

a postfeminist culture, and scrutinises them in its own failure to live up to them (Grdešić 2013: 356-57; see also Bell 2013, Fuller and Driscoll 2015). Indeed, Hannah and her friends can be unlikeable, spoiled, selfish, lazy, and even repugnant – but this is the point. Through its own self-awareness, then, *Girls* compels a renewed perspective when thinking about postfeminism and its various media inflections.

In its depiction of millennial girlhood, *Girls* recalibrates female subjectivity in order to reflect the actualities of living life where the promises and aspirations of postfeminism no longer hold sway in the current socio-cultural context. The series' 'provocative version of feminist girlhood' serves as part of HBO's established history of 'quality television', but rather than offering images of young women who should be independent and successful, *Girls* instead 'entwines comfort and dissatisfaction' to show that privilege and freedom do not necessarily result in fulfilment (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 254). The significance of growing up in post-recession America is, for many scholars, key to the representational strategies used in *Girls*. The more precarious, insecure representation of youthful femininity presented in the series can be identified in its attention to consumption and labour in 'interior' spaces such as the home and the body; a stark contrast to 'the glittering fantasies, impeccable fashion and self-assuredness' of city life experienced by the older women in *Sex and the City* (Dejmanee 2016a: 127-31). The navigation of friendships, love, sex, and work, are mapped by mistakes and misjudgements in *Girls* rather than through aspirational scenes, with the disappointments of Hannah and her friends often relayed via stinging comedy. The tagline accompanying its first season helps frame this overarching paradoxical relationship between aspiration and reality that the series consistently probes: 'Living the dream. One mistake at a time.' Indeed, earlier representations from the postfeminist canon, such as *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), have also been considered for the contradictions and ambiguities informing their articulation of the cultural and political landscape of the late 1990s (see Moseley and Read 2002). The precarity of the contemporary moment, however, has caused a representational shift. The girls in *Girls* no longer struggle with the postfeminist promise to "have it all" because this is not a conundrum that has a realistic place in such precarious times.

The ‘powerful resonance between postfeminism and neoliberalism’ (Gill and Scharff 2011: 7) is still operational in *Girls* but in ways that often illuminate the futility of postfeminist promises in the face of an oppressive, ‘more intensified neoliberalism’ (Genz 2017: 28; see also Bell 2013, Dejmaneea 2016, McDermott 2017). Catherine McDermott applies Lauren Berlant’s (2011) formulation of ‘cruel optimism’ as a productive lens to articulate the relationship *Girls* has with this socio-economic context, arguing that the ‘meticulous enactment and unravelling’ of postfeminist fantasies in the series does not simply dismiss investments in convention, but rather elicits an ‘impasse’ that ‘illuminates what it feels like to live the contradictions of the postfeminist promise’ (2017: 51). In this chapter, I shall foreground the importance of Dunham’s identity in the construction of this very particular self-aware, *feminist* address. This partly stems from Dunham’s multifaceted position at the helm of the series – being its creator, an actor, director, writer, and producer – but *Girls* makes up just one part of an intertextual performance that utilises different media platforms. Dunham’s status as a celebrity feminist assists the forming of a complex layering of identity that contributes in significant ways to the mediation of feminist concerns across different sites of popular culture.

Several scholars have already noted the semi-autobiographical nature of Dunham’s work, particularly in terms of its influences on the depictions of millennial life in *Girls*. Taylor Nygaard’s (2013) analysis, for example, focuses on HBO’s industrial imperatives which shaped the series’ origins. Dunham’s own millennial associations, illustrated by her strong social media presence on Twitter and Instagram fused well with the network’s attempts to attract younger female viewers, but her positioning within HBO’s brand of mostly male auteurs arguably undermined her own female voice (Nygaard 2013: 372-73). Faye Woods (2015) unpacks these tensions of gender and authorship in more detail through an examination of the narratives evolving in discourses asserting the authenticity of *Girls* and Dunham. In my own analysis, I draw on Woods’ conceptualisation of the ‘cultural blurring between Hannah and Dunham’, which was cemented through celebratory ‘paratextual framing’ of Hannah/ Dunham as ‘generational voices’ in early promotional cycles for *Girls* (2015: 41-3). I shall argue that the ironic, candid, and self-reflexive tone of

Dunham's storytelling functions across her different creative projects; ultimately extending the narrative landscape that *Girls* creates through these fictional/ real planes of authorship.

Through published literary works, including her memoir, *Not That Kind of Girl: A Young Woman Tells You What She's "Learned"* (2014a), as well as her more affirmatively feminist digital projects like the email newsletter *Lenny Letter*, and her *Women of the Hour* podcast, Dunham offers an extension of the authorial voice and performance that is central to *Girls* as a popular feminist text. In order to illustrate Dunham's labour in crafting these consistent narratives, I explicate some of the points of articulation between her real and fictional selves, with particular emphasis on instances where certain criticisms of Dunham's white, privileged perspective feeds back into the narrative landscape of *Girls.* Hannah's candidness also communicates a refusal to filter the, sometimes controversial and uncomfortable, narrative content of *Girls*, thus pre-empting gendered criticisms of the series 'by demonstrating a facility for both self-deprecation and high degrees of self-reflexivity' across multiple platforms, and showing an active engagement with the critical discourses surrounding her work (McRobbie 2015: 13; see also Bell 2013, DeCarvalho 2013, Grdešić 2013). As I also foreground here, Dunham's uses of social media contributes to the maintenance of this self-aware performance, as well as pushing her authoritative feminist agenda.

As a whole, this thesis points to the complex and often contradictory concerns inherently associated with an oppositional, political, social movement such as feminism, working from within the parameters of capitalist culture. Dunham and her identifications with 'the complicated nexus of feminism and celebrity' (Taylor 2014: 125) are explicitly entangled with such concerns, and as such, her celebrity status within popular culture embodies, for some critics, an ambivalence towards activism and/ or a rebranding that simply offers a 'gateway to feminism, not the movement itself' (Gay 2014c). Postfeminist discourses encapsulate this struggle, defined by 'an evident erasure of feminist politics from the popular' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 5). Neoliberal discourses add further critical weight to this position, through the promotion of the individual over the collective and the

equation of consumption with freedom, liberation, and empowerment; indicative of a capitalist ideology (Mendes 2012: 557-58). Dunham's public persona encapsulates these problematic positions as she occupies sites which arguably endorse the very values that feminism has often critiqued.

The mediation of feminism is fraught but Dunham appears comfortable in occupying grey areas, considering her work to be synonymous with a feminist agenda: 'I just think feminism *is* my work […] It is the thing that makes space for all of it. It means everything to me because it sort of is everything' (Dunham in Gay 2014b). Furthermore, how feminism is understood in popular discourse is continually being revised, revisited, and re-examined throughout the series, contingent upon the changing parameters of media culture and the roles that influential figures (both real and fictional) have in reframing how such issues are represented. Many critiques of Dunham's feminism focus on its 'celebrity endorsements' and 'seductive marketing campaign[s]' (Gay 2014c), articulating a push and pull between what is "right" and "wrong" in feminist politics. As I discuss, the raced, classed, and gendered nature of her creative outputs and social media engagements complicate Dunham's feminism, demonstrating a concerning lack of awareness for her privilege and the systems of oppression that her sometimes misguided language contributes to. More broadly, Dunham's white privilege has impacted discussions about the 'problem of representation' in *Girls* (McCann 2017); a major issue for many women/ feminists of colour (see, for example, Stewart 2012), who take aim at the series for its lack of diversity.

As a public personality and someone who makes feminism central to the 'performative practice' of her celebrity (Marwick and boyd 2011), Dunham thus stands as a striking point of reference from which to examine and extend the debates from the previous chapter. Coming of age for a celebrity takes place in public; thus requiring a certain amount of labour of performance to appear authentic and connected to audiences (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 50). Dunham foregrounds her own 'emotion work' via the personal/ public disclosures she makes on certain social media platforms; illustrating the 'emotionally difficult psychic journey complicated by fame and the media spotlight' (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 50). The perils and violence committed against women online is a

pressing concern for many feminist scholars (see, for example, Jane 2014, Horeck 2014, Banet-Weiser 2015a, Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016), a concern which Dunham herself voices as part of her performance.

As well as her public status, gender, and her prolific social media presence, Dunham's problematic racial politics have arguably led to her becoming an object for consistent hateful discourse online. As Dunham's friend and the co-producer of *Girls* and *Lenny Letter* Jenni Konner notes, this is something that has required significant labour to combat on Dunham's part:

> She hears the criticism, tried to address it and often apologises. I don't think she gets enough credit for the growth. It's very hard to be a young person exposed to all that fame and to be really, really smart and articulate yourself politically at all junctures. I wish the thing people would admire about her more is how much she is trying to grow publicly. (in Bernstein 2017 [sic])

Dunham is trying to grow publicly, both as a woman and as a feminist. As I discuss in detail, here, an ironic and self-deprecating tone permeates *Girls*; sometimes explicitly addressing criticisms of Dunham via her fictional character, Hannah. Moreover, she sometimes uses Instagram to articulate detailed apologies and publicly own her faults. In this sense, then, the intense visibility and discourses of contention that surround Dunham's persona, reflect – and are reflexive of – the messy labour of growth and gendered experiences that *Girls* itself dramatises. What complicates these narratives of youth, however, is that they must be read in service of the 'maintenance of the celebrity as a viable public commodity' (Nunn and Biressi 2010: 50). It is a significant part of Dunham's brand and wider work that we accept her 'missteps' (Dunham 2014a); something that Angela McRobbie (2015) has argued is becoming a defining feature of postfeminism in the form of 'imperfection' (see also, Waters 2017). Dunham's fictional self is constructing her own marketable identity in the same way: Hannah's 'biographical production' can be read as part of 'neoliberalism's reflexive 'project of the self' that encourages individuals to become the authors of their own life scripts and constantly work to update/ upgrade the self' (Genz 2017: 24). As such, this analysis of Dunham's celebrity persona provides a more explicit consideration of the economic implications surrounding feminist performance in popular culture.

In order to elucidate the messiness of Dunham's feminism and how this speaks to contemporary feminist politics, each of the six sections in this chapter is dedicated to a specific part of her cross-platform performance. I begin by mapping the raced and classed nature of her celebrity persona, drawing on particular instances where accusations of 'white feminism' position her as a polarising figure in popular culture. Highlighting how her 'imperfections' are a key element of her memoir, I move on to discuss how this is reflected in the flawed representations of her *Girls*; thus showing how Dunham's writing for screen and print seeks to mine the contradictions of millennial experience in ways that complicate current understandings of postfeminism. The following two sections explicitly address Dunham's self-reflexive craft, illustrating how she employs irony and self-beratement to promote a blurring between herself and Hannah. Specifically, I focus on how Dunham uses certain aesthetics to build intertextual consistencies between her different creative projects. I employ detailed textual analysis of particular episodes in *Girls* (Season 4, Episode 2, 'Triggering' and Season 6, Episode 3, 'American Bitch'), to illuminate the articulations between Dunham's different planes of authorship, as well as to demonstrate how this extends the narrative landscape of the series; ultimately creating a productive space for self-critique and resistance to the policing of female narratives.

The final section consists of an analysis of Dunham's digital labour on platforms such as Instagram, as well as her development of *Lenny Letter*. I draw attention to the ways in which Dunham (re)negotiates these mediated spaces. These spaces are of particular importance in a cultural moment where 'the yoking of celebrity and feminism continues to evolve' (Hamad and Taylor 2015: 126). I ask to what extent Dunham's labour on these platforms – in conjunction with the 'productive irritation' of postfeminism (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 253) – can be read as a means to generate publicity, or whether this can be seen as political. While her work and presentation of self are inevitably bound up with issues of commerce and privilege that are contested – which may be thought of as contributing to an ephemeral kind of feminism – I argue that Dunham's visible cross-platform labour compels a revision and re-examination of how current understandings of feminism are continually shaped by celebrity. Thus, in line with the main focus of this

thesis, this chapter is a study of how Dunham's, sometimes messy, negotiations of her identity open up the tensions for feminism in this contemporary moment.

Girls, Dunham, and Racial Tensions in Contemporary Feminisms

Since its run ended with its sixth season on 16 April, 2017 there has been something of a revival of what Woods has termed '*Girls* talk' – the 'industrial hype and dense swirl' of commentary channelled by television critics, feminist bloggers, and HBO's own promotional outputs like that which surrounded its arrival (2015: 38). While some commentators reflect on the legacy of *Girls*' female-driven comedy (Bernstein 2017), some revisit how its representations of sex, the female body, race, friendship, and its use of stinging comedy, guided by Dunham's distinct authorial voice, have changed television – or not (Wortham et al. 2017). Others criticise its continued fraught relationship with realism (Vanarendonk 2017). The 'White Girls on *Girls*' and the 'complete lack of diversity' that came along with Dunham's depiction of millennial life in Brooklyn (Stewart 2012) became a significant strand of the main thrust of criticism aimed at the series upon its arrival – and has set the course for the conversations surrounding the series since.

'*Girls* talk' lit up considerably in online spaces, with conversations populating women-centred websites and blogs such as *Jezebel* and *Racialicious*, revealing strong female (feminist) communities and writing pools which brought together a wide diversity of viewpoints (Woods 2015: 45). Of course, there was also much praise for *Girls*. There were those who lauded the series for its 'acute observations' and its ability to capture millennial life down to an 'atmospheric authenticity' (Paskin 2012). Other responses positioned it as 'like nothing else on TV', foregrounding Dunham's ability as an author to pull out the complexities of female friendships using 'sly, brazen, graphic comedy' and render this experience significant in such a way that it 'felt like a retort to a culture that pathologizes feminine adventure' (Nussbaum 2012). But as Kendra James writes for *Racialicious*,[25] this supposed 'universal experience' is severely limiting: 'regardless of what Emily

[25] The article originally posted to Racialicious.com in 2012 no longer exists but has been archived at www.medium.com, which I cite from here.

Nussbaum says I do not consider *Girls* to be For Us *or* By Us. Nussbaum's 'Us' and Dunham's *Girls* eliminate […] the reality of a minority-majority NYC population […] Once again we've been erased from the narrative' (2016). As Dodai Stewart notes in a key piece of criticism about *Girls* on *Jezebel*: 'Does *Girls* have the right to be all-white? Of course. But we, the public, have the right to critique the insular, homogenous world a young woman […] has chosen to present. Because it's exclusionary, disappointing, unrealistic, and upsetting. And it perpetuates a sad trend' (2012). This commentary not only spoke out about issues of marginalised representation in popular culture perpetuated by certain individuals and wider industrial systems, then, but these voices also addressed who has the right to speak such critique.

As Woods argues, this online commentary about *Girls* shares affiliations with third wave feminism in its intersectional approach and diversity of viewpoints, as if 'pushing back against popular culture's populist embrace of the white middle-class world of consumer-led postfeminism' (2015: 45). Indeed, the 'many-voiced messiness' precipitated by *Girls*' arrival to television (Woods 2013) is reflective of the increasingly messy politics of postfeminism; a complicated context which informs all three case studies in this thesis, popular at a time that is understood to be a particularly complex cultural moment for feminism. James's previously cited piece, for example – 'Dear Lena Dunham, I exist' (2012) – calls up a similar feeling of anger and insistence to be heard that can be inferred from the title of hooks' notable work, *Ain't I a Woman?* (1981) – a text particularly influential to third wave feminist thought (Heywood and Drake 1997: 9). The ways in which *Girls* – and Dunham – have been held to account are deeply informed by past and present discourses of feminism and, more specifically, the perceived failings of their popular inflections. Indeed, these criticisms position Dunham as directly responsible for the racial erasure in the casting calls for the series. Even her later attempts to address these concerns – such as the brief appearance of Donald Glover as Hannah's African-American Republican boyfriend (Sandy) – were dismissed by some as 'White Girl Feminism At Its Worst' (Ayres-Deets 2013).

This apparent racial blindspot along with Dunham's elevated sense of entitlement have continued to mire her public performances and her feminism. While she has been accepting of this hallmark criticism of *Girls*, Dunham also staunchly defends her right to speak her own truth. In an interview for *Nylon* magazine in February 2017, for example, Dunham acknowledges her mistakes upon reflection: 'I wouldn't do another show that starred four white girls' (in Wappler 2017). But at the same time as this admission, she remains unapologetic about the privilege that informs and sustains her creative decisions: 'I wrote the pilot when I was 23. Each character was an extension of me […] I was not trying to write the experience of somebody I didn't know, and not trying to stick a black girl in without understanding the nuance of what her experience of hipster Brooklyn was' (in Wappler 2017). Dunham's feminist agenda is continually problematised in this way by the raced and classed nature of her engagements. Particularly within digital public(s), there have been notable instances where Dunham's interactions overtly reflect her white privilege; seemingly reinforcing longstanding accusations of her 'White Girl Feminism.' As Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake point out, such ignorance, contradiction, and confusion about hegemonic privilege on the part of white women has long characterised previous waves of feminist consciousness in ways which have contributed to the very structures that the movement has sought to oppose (1997: 12).

Other instances of these tensions are evident in Dunham's own twice-weekly online newsletter *Lenny Letter*, co-created with fellow *Girls* showrunner Jenni Konner, which while affirmatively feminist, is responsible for published comments made by Dunham regarding NFL player Odell Beckham Jr., provoking severe criticism and backlash for their harmful racial connotations. In an interview with actor and comedian Amy Schumer, Dunham expresses her resentment at Beckham Jr.'s behaviour towards her at the 2016 Met Ball, wherein she surmises that the athlete purposefully ignored her because she was 'not the shape of a woman by his standards' (Dunham 2016a). The backlash from some cultural critics argued that such comments are damaging for the ways in which they can be seen to perpetuate wider racial stereotypes about black male sexuality in as much as they ascribe misogynist thoughts and characterisations to the football player (Blay 2016).

In an apology to Beckham Jr. published to her Instagram account, Dunham claims that her comments were an extension of her own insecurities at not measuring up to certain industry standards of beauty but recognises that her thoughts were based on 'narcissistic assumptions' (Dunham 2016b). Further she adds: 'after listening to lots of valid criticism, I see how unfair it is to ascribe misogynistic thoughts to someone I don't know AT ALL […] But most importantly, I would never intentionally contribute to a long and often violent history of the over-sexualization of black male bodies' (Dunham 2016b).

A similar format followed Dunham's comments about abortion during an episode of her podcast *Women of the Hour*, produced in association with social news and entertainment company BuzzFeed. In Episode 5 of the podcast's second season entitled 'Choice', Dunham recalls her behaviour at a Planned Parenthood meeting in Texas where she was asked by a young girl to contribute to a project in which women share their experiences of abortion. Dunham perceives her jumpy response to this request – wishing to make it clear that she had *not* had an abortion – as an example of her own subconscious "stigma" towards this issue: "Even I, the woman who cares as much as anybody about a woman's right to choose, felt it was important that people know I was unblemished in this department. Now I can say that I still haven't had an abortion, but I wish I had" (in *Women of the Hour* 2016). Supposedly this was an attempt to express empathy and solidarity to all those affected by abortion, whether in a personal or professional capacity. But following a fervent backlash, Dunham once again took to Instagram to apologise, stating that she did not seek to diminish the credible work of the 'medley of voices' that took part in this particular episode of the podcast for it 'was meant to tell a multifaceted story about reproductive choice…and bodily autonomy' (2016c). She further claims: 'My words were spoken from a sort of "delusional girl" persona I often inhabit, a girl who careens between wisdom and ignorance (that's what my TV show is too) and it didn't translate. That's my fault' (Dunham 2016c).

Dunham, then, is a polarising figure, notably not unlike many other celebrity feminists from previous generations, such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Naomi Wolf (Taylor 2016: 251). As epitomised by these critical conversations, the personal

politics that she espouses – choice, a strong sense of self, and the likening of her writing to a form of feminist activism – along with her, sometimes controversial self-presentation, aptly articulate a push and pull between what is conceived of as "right" and "wrong" in terms of feminism. To use her own words, Dunham's performances, in some ways, can be perceived to 'careen between wisdom and ignorance' (Dunham 2016c). Her heightened renown since *Girls* aired has exposed her to instantaneous and intense public scrutiny from the world's media on numerous occasions, which is amplified by social media in particular. Some of the ways in which Dunham uses racial discourse easily corroborates her own statement about her persona, as well as conveying an ignorance that is disparate from an intersectional feminist project. The broader tensions between postfeminism and more intersectional forms of feminism are brought to bear through Dunham's public persona. Third wave discourses, for example, stand to fiercely counter the pervasiveness of a postfeminist ideology disseminated across popular culture, as it largely represents a depoliticising of feminist ideas, and an erasure of diverse voices that ultimately weaken feminism (Kinser 2004).

Dunham's essay about a trip to Japan published online, which included the terms 'Yellowish Fever' and a description of a Japanese woman's hands as 'like paper cranes' (Dunham 2011), for instance, has been criticised for its orientalist connotations (see Blay 2013). Further, Dunham's lack of willingness to engage with her own outright dismissal of certain criticisms regarding the racial implications of her work and performance, also illustrate this polarity between 'wisdom' and 'ignorance'. Dunham's delayed response to comedian Lisa Lampanelli's 'intentionally humorous' appropriation of the n-word to caption a Twitter photo featuring the two women in 2013 caused much controversy online, not least for its seeming disregard of the racist connotations of the term (Blay 2013). While Dunham was not responsible for Lampanelli's tweet, she eventually apologised but insisted that 140 Twitter characters 'will never be enough for the kind of dialogue that will actually help us address issues of race and class'; nevertheless, her initial silence was read by many as complicity (Davies 2013). Her expressed caution in this instance about what she refers to as engaging in 'Twitter debates' (in Davies 2013), is notable given her

public retreat from the platform in 2015. Motivated by an attempt 'to create a safer space for [her]self emotionally' from the constant barrage of hateful comments she receives, Dunham's Twitter profile is now reportedly only partially managed by herself (Delaney 2015). I shall return to the gendered perils of online expression in relation to Dunham's digital labour in more detail later, as it highlights the potential limitations of social media as a hostile and 'toxic' environment for feminist debate (Thelandersson 2014) and misogyny (Banet-Weiser 2015a). As Anthea Taylor notes, the intense media traction that Dunham's retreat from Twitter garnered suggests that social media engagement has become a completely normalised part of celebrity performance, even for feminists (2016: 255).

For now however, as many scholars have identified, the Internet has enabled and energised new modes of feminist discourse and activism (see, for example, Valenti in Solomon 2009, Keller 2012, Cochrane 2013, Keller and Ringrose 2015, Baer 2016, Retallack et al. 2016). Dunham's comments regarding Twitter as an insufficient space in which effectively to address issues of race and class, and her decision to create distance between herself and the platform, *do* show an explicit awareness on her part of the pitfalls to navigating this kind of mediated terrain. While her initial refusal to comment about Lampanelli's n-word tweet was seen to be problematic, it could also be argued that her silence was less a demonstration of complicity but more an active negotiation of this potentially hostile environment. As Fredrika Thelandersson observes, it is the more conflicting, aggressive debates that are widely reported in mainstream and popular media, helping to channel 'the tired old stereotype' of [feminist] "catfighting"', perhaps because the more detailed and constructive discussion that takes place in online spaces 'lacks the sensationalism required for a click-based media economy' (2014: 528-29). Given less attention are the 'teaching moments' that can arise from feminist discourse on platforms such as Tumblr, which allow for more detailed discussion, the potential for open, 'fruitful and educating conversations', and the 'sharing of knowledge between multiple individuals across geographical constraints' (Thelandersson 2014: 528-29). Dunham's reluctance to engage immediately was disappointing to those who admired and looked up to her (Davies 2013), and can be interpreted as an ignorance of her own privilege (Blay 2013).

Having said this, Dunham's subsequent apologies do display well thought-out acknowledgements of this intersectional criticism and a willingness to learn and concede ground in such 'teaching moments'.

Dunham's status as celebrity renders the labour of her feminist interactions and subsequent negotiations as intensely public. More specifically, it is her mistakes and how she learns from them that are made highly visible. As Thelandersson notes, part of the 'personal and messy' work of being a feminist is to recognise white (and other) privilege, and this in itself is not necessarily what makes a "bad feminist", but rather to abuse and ignore privilege: 'Making mistakes is human, and it doesn't make us inadequate feminists to do so, unless we fail to take responsibility for it. And on the opposite end, feminists who fail can't be punished forever if they're willing to stand up for their actions' (2014: 529). While this labour of feminist negotiation and persona-building is increasingly normalised in public through platforms like Twitter (Taylor 2016: 220-21), the 'on-going maintenance' involved in the '*performative practice*' of this celebrity (Marwick and boyd 2011: 140 [original emphasis]) is arguably what complicates the validity, or 'authenticity', behind these markers of human experience. As Zeba Blay notes, Dunham does not claim 'that she has it all figured out. Part of her brand, of course, is her imperfection, the sense that she unabashedly does *not* have it all figured out' (2013 [original emphasis]). In other words, these apologies are performative, thus belying the authenticity and humanness that 'teaching moments' are thought to imply.

A case in point: Dunham introduces her autobiographical book of essays *Not That Kind of Girl*, as a record of her own personal 'missteps' and 'hopeful dispatches from the frontlines' in the 'struggle' of growing up (2014a: xvii). As its title indicates, the focus of the book is on what the author is not ('I am not a sexpert, a psychologist, or a dietitian. I am not a mother of three or the owner of a successful hosiery franchise' (Dunham 2014a: xvii)), as well as what she would like to become ('But I am a girl with a keen interest in having it all' (2014a: xvii)). But as McRobbie argues, this sense of 'growing up' and making mistakes is relative to, and cushioned by, Dunham's white, middle-class privilege, which also functions as the '*raison d'être* for *Girls*' and the butt of much criticism levelled

against it (2015: 13). Even in Dunham's attempts to capture the 'shameful fall' from the ideal of celebrity perfection, which speaks to a sense of 'vulnerability' and 'fragility' that may be relatable, such an embracing of her failures are presented and performed within a 'space of seemingly endless youth', arguably licensing a 'self-obsession' and 'quasi-feminism' (McRobbie 2015: 14-15). Similar to the postfeminist woman who is 'quintessentially adolescent' and in constant pursuit of "having it all" (Projansky 2007: 45), the authenticity and supposed ordinariness of her "struggle" is seemingly positioned within this gendered trope and its attendant problematic erasure of issues relating to class, race, and privilege.

In a similar vein to the longstanding critiques of postfeminist culture, celebrity feminism faces continued scrutiny for its arguably 'watered down' and 'surface level articulation of feminist concepts' (Kilpatrick 2015; see also Keller and Ringrose 2015: 134). As Taylor points out, such observations contain 'the presumption that celebrity feminists do not have the cultural competence or authority to speak on feminism's behalf, lacking the appropriate background, politics, or skills to make adequate political interventions' (2016: 279). Dunham has been bracketed alongside other female celebrities such as Miley Cyrus, Jennifer Lawrence, and Emma Watson for their 'vague "rebranding feminist" efforts' and public reclamations in support of a movement that lacks 'the actual work feminism' (Gay 2014c). But such criticism appears disingenuous upon consideration that Roxane Gay herself belongs to the same circuits of fame as those whose celebrity identity she positions in binary opposition to an 'authentic' feminist movement (albeit her celebrification is a direct product of her feminism unlike those she criticises) (Taylor 2016: 279). Moreover, Gay's published collection of essays entitled *Bad Feminist* (2014a), is supposedly a critique that decries the feminist border policing that she believes harmful to the movement (Taylor 2016: 279-80). Indeed, such binaries have long been considered limiting and unproductive because they are based on the notion that an ideal feminism exists to which all other forms seem to pale in comparison. As Jennifer Wicke noted back in the early 1990s, there are no 'authentic images' of feminism to compare with supposedly false ones, and no 'privileged autonomous space' where feminism may exist

outside of celebrity culture (1994: 753-57). Celebrity visibility should not always be considered as a 'selling out', for 'celebrity discourse is a powerful political site, a current state of being, and a predominantly social process' (Wicke 1994: 756). Now a growing field of scholarship in its own right, the study of celebrity and the identities associated with this culture account for the political and social significance of this work.

This is not to say that the corporate repackaging of feminist ideas associated with individuals like Sheryl Sandberg, for example, who are 'lifted up' above others in the neoliberal marketplace (hooks 2013), and who arguably encourage an individualised project completely unmoored from any notion of social inequality (Rottenberg 2014), should stand uncontested. It is undeniable that 'the glittery light of the latest celebrity feminist' garners more attention than 'the actual work of feminism' within contemporary media culture, privileging the same voices and the same conversations, which then continue to feed 'seductive marketing campaigns' (Gay 2014c). As McRobbie argues, 'feminism is instrumentalised' and 'converted into a much more individualistic discourse' that is easily deployed in media and popular culture via commercialised, commodified images (2009: 1). Dunham is aware of her capacity in this context and seemingly embraces the idea of feminism in branded form (Clark 2014), openly disregarding the determining discourses often levelled at herself and other celebrity feminists: 'The debate about good and bad feminism makes me want to take a nap for a year' (@lenadunham 2013). As Anita Brady argues, rather than one "right" position that can represent the feminist cause, there is a need for 'a consideration of feminism as a politics in constant, and often contradictory, reproduction' (2016: 430). Dunham's comments seemingly infer a similar call for a more nuanced understanding of feminism and how one might engage with it in the current moment. Moreover, in a similar vein to those feminist scholars such as Whelehan, who notes the 'sensations of boredom and ennui' as a result of postfeminism's tired and repetitive applications in popular culture (2010: 159), Dunham's tweet about napping for a year displays a similar exhaustion in response to recurrent discussions regarding "good" and "bad" feminism.

As many third wave scholars have contended, mining the contradictions inherent within feminism and its multiple subjectivities is at once necessary and complex. Amber E. Kinser argues, for example, in order to avoid 'weak feminism', third wave thinking must invite dialogue that seeks to clarify 'the vicissitudes and authenticity of feminism', for '[f]eminist living is a complicated thing' (2004: 146). Such reasoning, however, still maintains that this clarification of feminism is to be framed in the same alternating terms – "good" or "bad" – that are often used to describe celebrity feminists. But as Brady proposes:

> the value of celebrity feminism might be precisely in the inability of feminists to agree on which celebrity feminists are hurting or hindering "feminism." It is the demonstration and production of this permanent contingency with regard to who gets to count as a legitimate feminist that I would argue is the substance, and the *work*, of celebrity feminism. (Brady 2016: 438 [original emphasis])

Thus the work of celebrity feminism is as much defined by what it is *not*, as by what it *is*. As Taylor notes, even in its disavowal by celebrities, certain understandings of feminism are still communicated (whether audiences engage with these or not) (2016: 282). Accusations against Dunham's handling of racial discourse and her seeming lack of account for her privilege, followed by her responses and selective apologies, demonstrates how political debates exposing "bad" feminism can be equally as rewarding for their 'teaching moments' (Thelandersson 2014: 528) as those that celebrate the "good".

These debates, taking place online or elsewhere, contribute to an evolving archive of feminist understanding and are arguably as much a part of the work of feminism as other feminist theory and praxis. The same can be said for *Girls*: what was missing from the series, what was not represented, precipitated a conversation that was so important and productive that it became as much an object of study and analysis as the text itself (Woods 2013, Woods 2015). This process of *working through*, of negotiating her 'missteps' (Dunham 2014a) in public – as controversial, problematic, and harmful as these are to others – have given prominence to the difficulty involved in negotiating a feminist identity. Working from within the parameters of capitalist culture, Dunham's celebrity both elevates and complicates her feminism but, at the same time, exposes the nuances in

current polarised debates. As I shall now discuss, what makes Dunham's feminist interventions and creative projects so distinctive in this regard, is the way that they are seemingly anchored by the ambiguous generational experience that she mines.

Working it Through: The Messiness of Millennial Life

As other feminist scholars have shown, Dunham's work and presentation of self is inevitably bound up with issues of commerce and privilege that stand as a point of contestation to her feminism (Daalmans 2013, Gay 2014c, McRobbie 2015). With celebrity practice comes the maintenance of a fan base, performed intimacy, authenticity, and access, as well as a marketable persona that may be *consumed* (Marwick and boyd 2011: 140 [emphasis added]). As Brady notes, to encounter Dunham and other celebrity feminists in relation to feminism is to always encounter this in relation to their particular star systems (2016: 438). Thus, Dunham's performance of feminism in media culture – 'a key site at which the meaning of feminism is not just represented, but formed' – is 'authenticated' and 'naturalised' by virtue of the very systems of power that have been afforded to her (Brady 2016: 434-35). The struggles that Dunham accounts for in her work, particularly in her book, are personal, and stand as 'the claims to authority' over her narrative and her truth (Taylor 2016: 251). As already discussed, critiques of this truth and the feminist credentials associated with Dunham's identity, often rest on the idea that she *does* seem to have it all: 'Dunham can afford to be imperfect at this stage in life, while still experimenting and looking for the right boyfriend. She does not at this point in time have to be as 'driven' in a bid to gain female control and success' (McRobbie 2015: 15). But there is a clear insistence from Dunham to tell her truth in spite of her privilege and to continue to strive for her right to tell it.

To use Brady's poststructuralist terms, the form that Dunham's feminism takes seemingly reaffirms her wider signifying celebrity system and in turn determines her own feminist causes (2016: 434). As such, the causes that she champions, whether they be in the form of campaigning for Planned Parenthood, supporting Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, or applauding Taylor Swift's definition of feminism via Twitter, are

part of a performance that demonstrates how the wider 'ecologies of news, celebrity, and digital media intersect in coverage of feminism' (Brady 2016: 434). Through their performances (albeit problematically), celebrities often 'write the terms of what a feminist identity is', utilising the extensive platforms and networks available to them to ensure that they take a high profile in setting the public agenda of feminist debate (Brady 2016: 434). In this regard, as McRobbie notes, 'what feminism actually means varies, literally, from one self-declared feminist to the next', and while this 'does not reduce its field of potential influence', this is still contained via problematic gendered, raced, and classed hierarchies that do more to sustain than challenge the current system of economic power and domination (2009: 2). It is pertinent, therefore, to ask to what extent does Dunham's project of the self impede her feminist work. In other words, is this feminist performance merely to generate publicity or can this be considered as work with some political purchase?

Through the shameless self-promotion recognisable in tweets such as 'Applause for @taylorswift13's spot on definition of feminism (and NOT because she mentions me)' (@lenadunham 2014b), Dunham arguably subscribes to 'those cultural norms which celebrate the seeming gains of young white womanhood' (McRobbie 2015: 15), thus complicating the feminist position anchoring this activity. On the other hand, it could be argued that Dunham is simply utilising the cultural resources within which her identity is embedded to further her cause. As Shelley Budgeon notes, 'there is no 'real' feminist identity that transcends the culture within which it is produced' (2011: 282). Such projects of selfhood, Budgeon continues, in line with third wave thinking aim to 'advance a politics based upon *self-definition* and the need for women to define their personal relationship to feminism in ways that make sense to them as individuals' (2011: 283 [original emphasis]). Such a '[v]igorous assertion of one's own individuality' is indeed one of the hallmarks of postfeminist culture, one that has been easily aligned with hegemonic media representations of feminism, which often unquestioningly champion choice and empowerment (Shugart et al. 2001: 195-96). But rather than being complicit with a 'cultural appropriation of feminism' (McRobbie 2015: 16) that merely offers a 'surface level

articulation of feminist concepts' (Kilpatrick 2015), Dunham's political interventions do work to illuminate the messy, grey areas of feminism and female selfhood – offering a different inflection of postfeminism and privilege.

Part of Dunham's brand is that we accept her failings, but capitalising on such renown to further her causes has led to her feminism to be received as exclusionary and self-indulgent. These tensions, however, are in fact etched into the fabric of Dunham's work, particularly in *Girls*. As Wesley Morris argues: 'it's the scope of the comedy that takes it beyond a show merely of the white and the spoiled: It's *about* being white and spoiled and self-concerned' (in Wortham et al. 2017). This kind of representation invites humour at the expense of the characters and their brazen privilege, but this is often uncomfortable and jarring; thus opening up a space for further analytic inquiry (see Bell 2013: 364). The same comedic tone is familiar across the different elements of Dunham's performance, knowingly feeding off her status and privilege to inform her narrative and her feminism. Citing Helen Gurley Brown's *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money – Even If You're Starting With Nothing* (1982) as an inspirational source for *Not That Kind of Girl*, Dunham positions herself among other (white, middle-class) authors from the feminist canon, such as Gloria Steinem and Nora Ephron, whose guidance and endorsements she benefits from (2014a: xvi).[26] Steinem and Ephron, like many others in the women's movement, criticised Brown for 'peddling her particular brand of chipper, oblivious help for the downtrodden' (Dunham 2014a: xvi). Rather than contributing to such longstanding critiques by her feminist foremothers, however, Dunham commends Brown's 'self-serving perspective' for the rich picture that it paints: that 'a powerful, confident, and, yes, even sexy woman could be made', as well as born (2014a: xvi). The candid, self-deprecating, and self-reflexive tone with which Dunham recounts her experiences about such things as love, sex, friendship, work, and life, are deployed with some comic irony here (McRobbie 2015: 14); thus building a notable distinction between her own work and Brown's.

[26] *Not That Kind of Girl* is dedicated to Nora Ephron who died in 2012. Writing in *The New Yorker* following her death, Dunham (2012) stated that Ephron's advice in their short friendship before her death (on topics including 'the complex legend of Helen Gurley Brown') was 'unparalleled'.

The same can be said for the calling up of familiar postfeminist tropes such as "having it all". Dunham loosely proffers her experiences of attempting to "have it all" as advice to her readers, only immediately to question and undermine the value of such promises. Indeed, the use of scare quotes in her book's title undercuts the authority of which it implies (Taylor 2016: 251). As has already been noted, such promises seemingly fail to have the same sort of cultural currency as in previous decades. Dunham undercuts the glamour and effectiveness of such authoritative writing, seemingly as a nod towards this shift: 'I'm already predicting my future shame at thinking I had anything to offer you, but also my future glory in having stopped you from trying an expensive juice cleanse' (Dunham 2014a: xvii). In this candid, quirky mode of storytelling, Dunham recounts her gendered experiences of growing up as messy, foregrounding the uncertainties of the terrain between girlhood and womanhood. Essays titled 'Girl Crush: That Time I Was Almost a Lesbian, Then Vomited' and 'I Didn't Fuck Them but They Yelled at Me', humorously encapsulate the ambiguous spaces of female sexuality and cringe-worthy sexual encounters that cannot be so neatly labelled. A knowing irony associated with her privileged perspective also underlies 'My Top 10 Health Concerns', among which are 'a fear of tinnitus' and 'lamp dust' (Dunham 2014a: 236). While others, like 'Who Moved My Uterus', discuss in unapologetically graphic detail the painful trials of menstruation and her struggles with the symptoms of endometriosis (Dunham 2014a: 113-23). As with Gurley Brown, whose 'embarrassing, acne-ridden' accounts of the 'sacrosanct aspect[s] of feminine life such as diet, sex, or the intricacies of marriage' (2014a: xv) she appreciates, Dunham injects her own imperfections with a similar pathos. In this way, her work can be seen to address feminist expectations as much as it complicates them.

There is little doubt that Dunham positions her writing as a feminist act: 'There is nothing gutsier to me than a person announcing that their story is one that deserves to be told, especially if that person is a woman' (2014a: xvi). As is evident in terms of how she voices her experiences of sexuality and embodiment, the second wave project of conceptualising the 'personal as political' is never far from the centre of her work (Nash and Grant 2015: 980). A seeming rebuke to the gendered criticisms that position 'personal

writing by women [as] no more than an exercise in vanity and that we should appreciate this new world for women, sit down, and shut up' (Dunham 2014a: xvi), Dunham relishes the subjective perspective allowed for through memoir as well as its cathartic release: 'I want to tell my stories and, more than that, I *have to* in order to stay sane: […] And if I could take what I've learned and make one menial job easier for you […] then every misstep of mine was worthwhile' (2014a: xvi-ii [original emphasis]). Her confessional insight appears to function as 'a bildungsroman for millennials'; mining her mistakes for the benefit of other women (Taylor 2016: 251). Critiques of Dunham and her work, however, find fault in the narcissism of such a (privileged) personal perspective.

To further my previous point with respect to Dunham's (2016b) apology to Odell Beckham Jr., making racist remarks and then apologising for them becomes entangled with her performance; making it less about those who are harmed by these remarks, and more about the privilege afforded to Dunham by her platform. As Mikki Kendall cogently explicated in a thread on Twitter, Dunham's reframing of a 'completely non verbal interaction' in order to address her own appearance is the problem (@Karnythia 2016b), as it erases both the oppressive systems that uphold her privilege, along with the institutionalised racism that may account for the reasons why black people choose to remain silent in the presence of someone like Dunham (@Karnythia 2016c): 'I see the "Odell didn't want to talk to Lena because she's larger" starting like Dunham doesn't eat her whole foot around race weekly' (@Karnythia 2016a). In moments such as these, the privilege underpinning her personal narrative shapes the issues that are brought to the fore. Moreover, the repetition of the cycle inherent in these familiar occurances (Dunham makes a comment, followed by backlash and an apology), however sincere these appear, does little to change the raced and classed dynamics which define public discourse.

As McRobbie argues: 'There is a kind of burden of female self-hood which seems to account for Dunham's self-absorption, as though this is the only way she can 'get through', otherwise it seems she would topple into despair or depression' (2015: 15). Echoed in these critiques are historical attributions of narcissism to femininity and feminism, which as Imogen Tyler notes, have become central to the abjection of feminism

in popular media culture since the 1970s, supported by a saturation of 'representations of successful single women as shallow, self-obsessed girls: think *Cosmopolitan* and *Sex in the City*' (2005: 26). Central to the emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement were arguments and feminist strategies, which sought to 'redefine the nature of power and politics through the politicization of personal experience' (Tyler 2005: 37). These identity practices, while positive in terms of establishing groups, communities, and networks that helped to raise the profile of feminism, also coincided with a maligning of feminism as narcissism by the conservative right (Tyler 2005: 36). This was 'cemented in the popular cultural imaginary by liberal elites' such as Naomi Wolfe who argued that 'the popularity of the women's liberation or feminist movement [is nothing more than this]: *Let's Talk About Me*' (in Tyler 2005: 36 [original emphasis]). Dunham's book directly addresses these on-going tensions between the public and the private (Taylor 2016: 251), while her girls from *Girls* seemingly make no apologies for the narcissistic outlook of their generation.

Straight out of what *Time* magazine's May 2013 issue calls 'The Me Me Me Generation', the characters from *Girls* are indeed 'lazy, entitled, selfish and shallow'; trying to negotiate their existence in an age defined by 'the information revolution', social media, celebrity, and reality TV (Stein 2013). Seeking to mine female experience in a millennial generation, such things as Twitter, references to Beyoncé, and reality TV are elements through which Hannah and her friends map their twenties. In a brazen display of the characters' millennial narcissism early in the first season (Episode 3, 'All Adventurous Women Do'), Shoshanna, who often comes closest to caricature (Bell 2013: 364), explains to Hannah the basic format of *Baggage* (2010-), her favourite reality TV dating game show. Contestants, while in a bid to win a date, must carry a small, medium, and large suitcase on stage with them, which represent different levels of personal "baggage" that they must confess and defend. After asking Hannah what her own baggage would be, Shoshanna hastily interrupts with her own: her irritable bowel syndrome, that she does not love her grandmother, and that she remains a virgin (notably the last of these points appearing physically more painful to disclose than the former). Visible on the wall of Shoshanna's well-furnished apartment behind her, is a poster for the first filmic adaptation

of *Sex and the City* (2008); clearly illustrating *Girls*' awareness of itself to the iconic series. Shoshanna's references to the archetypes of feminine identity exemplified by its characters, Carrie, Samantha, and Charlotte, foregrounded its legacy in the pilot episode of *Girls* (Nash and Grant 2015: 979). Despite the inevitable comparisons that have been drawn between the two series, however, *Girls* represents a generation quite different to the one depicted in *Sex and the City*.

While the narrative of *Girls*, following four women as they experience the trials and tribulations of love, sex, and dating in New York, seemingly takes its premise from its predecessor, it is the emphasis on the *trials* of millennial life – featuring 'yogurt rather than cocktails' and 'discussion of texting and bruising [as a result of a sexual encounter]' – that shift the series 'in time and tone' from *Sex and the City* (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 260). Dunham acknowledges connections to other youth-centred representations such as *Gossip Girl* (2007-2012), depicting the upper-class lives of adolescents in Manhattan's Upper East Side, but argues that *Girls* deals with a 'whole in between space that hadn't really been addressed' (in Goldberg 2012). As 'a coming-of-age story with the characters awkwardly hovering between adolescence and adulthood' (Nash and Grant 2015: 980), the girls in *Girls* are sloppier, lazier, and arguably distinctly unlikeable.

As Nash and Grant argue, Dunham does not represent her characters as aspirational: 'viewers would not aspire to be like Hannah – who wears shabby, ill-fitting clothes, has no money, makes a number of poor life decisions, and muddles through relationships – even though they may identify with her' (2015: 979). But such is the intention and purpose of the series: *Girls* seeks to expose 'a murkier truth' (Nicholson 2017) about the gendered experiences of growing up than has previously been seen in a television series about women. As the taglines accompanying the first five seasons suggest, ('Living the dream. One mistake at a time'; 'Almost getting it kind of together'; 'Happily whatever after'; 'Nowhere to grow but up'; 'Finally piecing it together'), the emphasis is on life lived as a series of experiences, and with the process of growth depicted as confusing rather than idealistic.

Already discussed here, the reception to *Girls* was not always accepting of this flawed representation of young women. As Fuller and Driscoll argue in their analysis of 'the feminist and not-so-feminist' responses to *Girls*, criticisms levelled at the series for offering a lack of diversity, poor role models, and imperfect girls, reveals a glaring double standard 'that expects artistic representations of women to not only be realistic and complex but, most of all, positive' (2015: 256). The social flaws of Walter White in the critically acclaimed *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), for example, are praised as 'complex characterization', whereas *Girls* is expected 'to live up to the task of being all things to all women' ([Daalmans] 2013, 355)' but seemingly only through characters who are 'good people who have good experiences' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 256). In contradistinction, reflecting on *Girls*' six season run in *The Guardian*, Rebecca Nicholson concludes:

> There are plenty of television shows about monsters. Girls walked a delicate line by making its core characters troubled, privileged and narcissistic – almost monsters, but never quite. They're certainly hard to like. But it's a credit to the craft of Girls that by the end, it's easier to understand them. (Nicholson 2017)

As many feminist scholars have elucidated, key to this understanding and this craft is *Girls*' reflexivity about the context in which it exists. *Girls* both actively invokes feminist and postfeminist discourses and the attendant criticisms of whiteness and privilege, and scrutinises these by failing to live up the expectations inherent within them (Grdešić 2013, Bell 2013, Fuller and Driscoll 2015, Nash and Grant 2015).

Its feminist stance has been contested on the grounds of *Girls*' seeming 'celebration of immaturity and directionless self-reflection' with its characters arguably only offering 'a 'white hipster' fantasy of justified aimlessness in an anomic society where the foundations for purpose and accomplishment have been lost even to some of its more privileged members' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 257). As Fuller and Driscoll go on to argue, however, the point here is that '[t]he girls of *Girls* are […] not the postfeminist 'new package of young female success' (Harris 2004, 22). But they invoke it by failing to measure up to it. Rather than [Anita] Harris's can-do girls they are girls who should-be-able-to-but-don't' (2015: 257). This could also be read as an implicit critique of an individualistic feminism, one that Dunham has, through her own 'missteps' (Dunham 2014a), proven to be

inherently flawed. Her apologies are required to absolve her and legitimise her feminism but merely work temporarily to mask the system that she continues to benefit from – a tension that I shall later return to in relation to Dunham's use of social media.

Despite the complexities which stem from Hannah and her friends being afforded the same economic and sexual independence as the women in *Sex and the City*, however, the youth of today are growing up in different times. The 'post-recession' context of *Girls* has been noted by a number of scholars for its significance in terms of how this effects the financial (in)security of the characters. DeCarvalho notes a shift towards a 'post-graduation/postfeminist entitlement' that leaves behind the "liberated" hardworking women characters of 1970s and 1990s/ 2000s workplace comedies, seemingly to embrace a new sense of entitlement that affords Hannah control over her life and her choices – but little ambition to try and make something of these (2013: 370). In this context, '"choice" has morphed from a "freedom" to an encumbrance' and while *Girls* clearly is a postfeminist text, like *Sex and the City* before it, these notions are inflected differently (Nash and Grant 2015: 979-80). *Girls* seeks to question its own 'backdrop of unabashedly postfeminist media culture' (DeCarvalho 2013: 370) by unpicking such logics.

In the oft-cited opening scene from the pilot episode, we are introduced to Hannah voraciously stuffing spaghetti into her mouth during a meal out with her parents, who inform her that they are no longer willing to fund her "groovy lifestyle" in New York (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot'). Hannah's privileged self-entitlement underlies her lament at this seemingly "arbitrary" decision by her parents to cut off their "only child": "This is nuts. I could be a drug addict. Do you realise how lucky you are?" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot'). By the end of the scene, Hannah refuses to meet with them again before they return home: "I have work, and then I have a dinner thing, and then I am busy, trying to become who I am" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot'). While Hannah's description of her "busy" schedule arguably legitimises her parents' assumptions regarding her lackadaisical attempts at finding a real job for herself, there is a glaring generational gulf between her own experiences of unpaid internships, the struggling economy, and student loans, and

how her parents fared at her age – or, indeed, how the women from *Sex and the City* fared. Thus, even while centring on and perhaps valorising liberal individualistic values, which Dunham herself is accused of embodying, *Girls* implicitly draws attention to and critiques the socio-economic structures that underpin these values.

As Bell notes, the older generations in *Girls* have clearly benefited from chasing the American Dream, whereas for Hannah and her friends, 'youth stretches beyond adolescence' in a time defined by 'an undeniable ubiquity of unpaid work, youth exploitation, and often insurmountable barriers to entry level positions in the US and in other capitalist economies' (2013: 364-65). The futility of their attempts to make something of themselves is tinged with pathos and parody, as their coming of age is subject to their status as disciplinary subjects, and thus, '[t]o see the girls' drive for self-improvement as simply another sad byproduct of postfeminist ideology is to maintain a fragmented understanding of these youth' (Bell 2013: 364-65 [sic]). The ideal postfeminist woman is 'always in process' and in a constant state of becoming towards adulthood, and towards "having it all", so as to feed a relentless corporate commodity culture (Projansky 2007: 45). *Girls*, therefore, 'unravels' these conventions – or perhaps even rejects them – unearthing the 'cruel hopes that direct feminine desires toward patently false promises' (McDermott 2017: 56).

Indeed, '[a]nxious self-absorption abounds' (Bell 2013: 364), bound up in such things as Shoshanna's steadfast faith in her self-help, how-to manual (*Listen Ladies! A Tough Love Approach to the Tough Game of Love*), Hannah's very real fears about the "Stuff that gets up around the sides of condoms", and Jessa's fleeting marriage to a boring but eligible bachelor, Thomas-John (Chris O'Dowd). Reference to Marnie's online therapist, helping her to come to terms with her impending divorce during the final season (Season 6, Episode 1, 'All I Ever Wanted'), also points to the emotional labour involved in these experiences of growth. Perhaps more troubling, is how such online technologies seemingly substitute for the clear absence of therapeutic, affective relationships in Marnie's life; she finds comfort not in her interactions with friends and lovers, but in such forms of self-governance and self-management. Recent scholarship has identified self-

quantification and performance monitoring via technologies to be part of a broader shift towards a neoliberal ethos of self-governance and health management, whereby increasing focus is on the individual to be in charge of their health and wellbeing (Ajana 2017: 4). As addressed in Chapter 2, *The Hunger Games* offers a commentary, via Katniss's gendered perspective, on the physical, psychical, and psychological effects of a ruthless individualism on society propagated by a media-saturated landscape. For Katniss, there is a disconnect between how she feels and how she must perform her feelings as a celebrity. There is a similar disconnect notable in *Girls*, between the life that the friends monitor themselves towards and the 'panoptical discourse' that they remain 'stalled within' (Bell 2013: 366).

What such elements invoke is 'the lens of postfeminism and […] institutionalized, neo-liberal privilege', demonstrating how this monitoring and self-discipline is internalised by these characters as they attempt to navigate their way towards womanhood, which do appear humorous, but also deeply disturbing (Bell 2013: 366). Even Marnie's aspiration to study law, for instance, is mostly driven, not by professional or moral imperatives, but by "the idea of all the rules" (Season 6, Episode 10, 'Latching'). As Tisha Dejmanee notes, the girls' feelings of anxiety are heightened 'through the show's commitment to abject and grotesque forms of intimacy', whether that be Hannah's frequent nudity and graphic, awkward sexual encounters, the bloody q-tip that pierced her eardrum, or Jessa's period, which interrupts sex with a stranger in the public toilet of a bar (2016a: 128). The 'messiness of real emotions and experience' explored in *Girls* is key to its 'biting' commentary and self-reflexivity (Bell 2013: 365). This is acutely executed in Season 3, Episode 7, 'Beach House', in which Marnie hosts a girls' weekend at a family friend's Long Island holiday home, in the hopes of "healing" their fracturing friendships. But before the night draws to a close, the girls enter into an argument wherein they pick each other apart over their personal faults: Hannah's narcissism, Shoshanna's lack of intellect and authoritative voice, Marnie's perfectionism, and Jessa's drug addiction. It is perhaps Shoshana's words to Hannah that resonate the loudest: "you're a fucking narcissist. Seriously, I have never met anyone else that thinks her own life is so fucking fascinating."

Refusing to accept each other's attacks, as is evident elsewhere in the series, 'it is clear that these characters are too busy perfecting their own self-help discourse to reach out to each other at all' (Bell 2013: 365). Earlier in the episode, Hannah and Marnie appear to bond, albeit tipsily, over their different, but equally privileged upbringings, but their ability to empathise with each other is refracted by their own inflated sense of themselves. Marnie's assessment of her current emotional state following her recent breakup ("I may not seem okay and I may not be okay now, but I am like, okay" (Season 3, Episode 7, 'Beach House')), as well as Hannah's narcissistic assumption that her seeming embrace of freedom in New York has somehow caused Marnie's feelings of abandonment, speaks volumes about the deep-rootedness of this 'grammar of individualism' (Bell 2013: 365). The intense irony that underpins this, however, as all the girls appear indifferent to their privilege and entitlement, works to subvert the contested logics of the postfeminist and neoliberal discourses that are invoked here. It is incredibly difficult for audiences to find reasons to 'like' these characters, not to mention the increasing struggle experienced by the friends as they run out of ways to identify with one another, which makes plain the harmful affects of these governing discourses. Thus, *Girls* consciously stages the discrepancies between postfeminist ideals and the faltering attempts to fulfil them, even from the most privileged – as if to ask, "what now?" (Bell 2013).

Such criticality is key to *Girls* and its feminist address. Although feminism itself is rarely mentioned explicitly by Hannah and her friends, a strong 'feminist awareness pervades the series and occasionally comes to the surface' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 257). Various plot lines directly address abortion, sex, sexuality, and body image, thus positioning such feminist, gendered issues at the forefront of the series' trajectory. Locating *Girls* as 'a millennial conscious-raising tool' through its engagement with past and present discourses of feminism, Nash and Grant argue that, aside from terms of race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality that are clearly contested, Dunham uses the medium of television effectively to engage with, and to advance, the feminist adage that the 'personal is political' by 'giving women a "voice" and unifying experience' in times of changed social,

economic, and political contexts (2015: 988). As I shall now move on to discuss, Dunham and her authorial voice have largely shaped how these issues and themes are presented.

Irony is, in fact, key to this feminist address, which extends to Dunham's acknowledgements of the potential criticisms levelled at her work, displayed through certain metatextual comments within the series' plots (Grdešić 2013: 357). An overt blurring between Dunham and her character (Woods 2013) is cemented by such comments, namely through Hannah's ambition to become a writer – or "the voice of her generation" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot') – a seemingly prophetic, satirical nod to the media's inevitable appropriation of the term in relation to Dunham herself. Further, the ironic, self-deprecating tone present in *Girls* is a crucial aspect of Dunham's feminist work and performance across arenas of popular culture, particularly in *Not That Kind of Girl*, and other diverse media platforms, such as social media. Understanding *Girls* as a feminist text is reliant upon the articulations between these multiple narratives, particularly in the ways that certain criticisms of Dunham's white, privileged perspective feeds back into the narrative landscape of the series.

Dunham's transmedia approach allows for more entry points into her narratives and forms part of her self-reflexive, feminist identity. As Rona Murray has identified, Dunham utilises a 'chameleon facility' to appeal to different audiences; thus foregrounding an ability to adapt and stylise her writing and humour for different contexts (2017: 4). However, Dunham's attempts to capitalise on her renown and attempt to maintain her visibility in such commercialised, capitalist arenas, means that her feminist agenda is contested and extremely complex. The next section addresses these tensions through a more thorough examination of the dynamic between Dunham and her fictional character, whose shared craft of writing helps cement this productive synthesis of narrative.

Hannah and Dunham: Authorship and Irony in *Girls*

Very much at the centre of *Girls*, both in its production and in its narrative, Dunham's significant authorial voice is shaped by the relationship between her character, Hannah, and her extratextual persona. As Nygaard makes clear in her industrial analysis of the

context surrounding *Girls*' emergence, Dunham was part of HBO's renewed strategy to stake its claim as the prestigious cable network among rising competition from premium networks, like Showtime, basic cable channels like AMC, and from streaming services, like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube (2013: 371). Leading up to its release and continuing as the first season aired, Dunham's authorship and female voice were repeatedly emphasised in what Woods calls a 'carpet bomb of hype from HBO' (2013). The network utilised traditional media outlets as well as heavily targeting online cultural spaces in their marketing campaign so as to appeal to a younger, 'technologically sophisticated millennial generation' (Nygaard 2013: 372). Dunham's prominent social media presence fused well with *Girls*' cross-platform reach, with trailers and clips circulated via YouTube, offering behind-the-scenes content featuring Dunham, which fitted nicely within the mould of HBO's industrial imperatives and target demographic.

As Nygaard elucidates, however, HBO's decision to recruit the then 24-year-old, 'relative[ly] unknown' Dunham as part of their prestigious line of established male auteurs, was initially met with some criticism of the network's supposed nepotistic practices (2013: 370-71). Indeed, Dunham and her co-stars are 'daughters of the cultural elite' (Woods 2013). Allison Williams is the daughter of Brian Williams, American journalist and news anchor at NBC; Zosia Mamet, is the daughter of the American, award-winning playwright, David Mamet; Jemima Kirke's father is associated with being a drummer for English hard rock band, Bad Company; and, of course, Dunham is the daughter of two successful artists from New York, and mentee of late writer and director, Nora Ephron. This, along with Dunham's previous ties with the prestigious Sundance Writer's Lab and her award-winning independent film *Tiny Furniture* (2010), emphasised her 'indie pedigree' in a bid to position her within HBO's larger quality auteurist tradition (Nygaard 2013: 372). Surfacing on the Internet around the time of *Girls*' initial release in 2012, a satirical take on HBO's promotional poster for the first season saw each of the four actors branded only by the names of their famous parents, and the title header replaced with 'NEPOTISM' (see Figure 3.1 below). The poster helped encapsulate the seeming hypocrisy behind HBO's casting practices – a white and privileged 'industry logic' that similarly plagues Hollywood

(Nygaard 2013: 371) – which arguably undermined its own attempts to position the characters in *Girls* as relatable twenty-somethings.

Figure 3.1. 'Nepotism' poster. http://newsweek.tumblr.com/post/21276936563/nepotism.

Even in the recent aftermath of its sixth and final season in 2017, critiques of whiteness and privilege are, and forthrightly so, still ubiquitous with discourse surrounding *Girls*. Dunham's comments about her 'pretentious and horrifying' pitch to HBO in an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* in February 2017, helped rekindle this dialogue. Describing it as more of a 'tone poem about millennial life', Dunham discloses that her one-page pitch did not even mention a plot or a character: 'it's the worst pitch you've ever read…but I remember writing it, sitting on the floor listening to Tegan and Sara in my underwear, being like, "I'm a genius"' (in Rose 2017). As Tressie McMillan Cottom tweeted in response to the article: 'Being white sounds amazing RT: @THR

.@LenaDunham was 23 when she sold #Girls to HBO with a page-and-a-half-long pitch, without a character nor a plot thr.cm/cMIzUT' (@tressiemcphd 2017).

The accumulative momentum of '*Girls* talk', the 'industrial hype and dense swirl of cultural commentary' surrounding the series (Woods 2015: 38), is palpable from such comments; seeming to illustrate its continued significance in shifting discussion towards raced and classed inequalities on screen and elsewhere. In fact, many commentators have since argued that what was recognised as lacking in *Girls then* and throughout its run, has impacted greatly on what it, and other television series like it, are seen to be doing (or not) *now*. Indeed, *Girls* 'was treated less like a low-key comedy of twenty-something struggle and more like a generational document' (Woods 2015: 38). As Nicholson (2017) writes about the initial critical reception of *Girls*, for example: 'For a TV show to undergo such intensive scrutiny felt novel. Now, it seems almost routine, but there is a sense that Girls, through Dunham, was a lightning rod for a necessary period of transition to get to this point.'

The uncompromising message about racism within American comedy-horror film *Get Out* (2017) is not unrelated, here – not least of all as *Girls*' Allison Williams takes a lead role. Through its use of satire, the film exposes the dangers of complacency with regard to the 'liberal ignorance and hubris that has been allowed to fester' in America with regard to race, fostered, however unintentionally, not by radical racist groups, but by seemingly "good", middle-class, white liberals (Bakare 2017). This explicit socio-political message has been critically acclaimed for its incredibly timely commentary given on-going racial anxieties in America; especially in the current 'post-Obama' context (Shepherd 2017). Directed and co-produced by Jordan Peele, *Get Out* follows a young interracial couple, Rose Armitage (Williams) and her black partner, Chris Washington (Daniel Kaluuya). Visiting Rose's parents on their secluded woodland estate in an affluent white neighbourhood, an overly-friendly welcome eventually subsides into a series of horrific, racially motivated events involving the family.

Of significance to this discussion is the role of Williams's character in one of the film's shocking twists: Rose acts as the attractive bait to lure African-American victims to

their fate at the hands of her parents. In a chilling scene following the capture of Chris, she is seen sitting in her bedroom surrounded by framed photos of her past relationships, whilst eating Froot Loops cereal, sipping milk through a straw, and listening to the famous track from the classic film *Dirty Dancing* (1987), '(I've Had) The Time of My Life'. As Jason Guerrasio puts it: 'It doesn't get more white than that' (2017). Peele, commenting on why Williams was a perfect fit for such a 'beautiful, psychotic image', says, '[s]he felt cosmopolitan but also undeniably Caucasian' (in Guerrasio 2017). Indeed, Williams's connection to the heavily-criticised representations of privilege in *Girls*, coupled with her own Ivy League education, is a knowing choice (Butler 2017), but one that resonates in a way that perhaps adds greater weight to existing criticisms.

As a result of Dunham's multifaceted role in the creation of *Girls*, most critiques questioning the universality and authenticity of the series were principally directed at Dunham. As Woods has shown, by the time that *Girls* debuted, 'paratextual groundwork' had already taken place, discursively framing the collapse of Dunham's auteur identity with that of her character's (2015: 40). Promotional discourses often focused on her privileged upbringing, her own experience as a source for her comedy, issues of privacy in life and online for millennials, and her freedom with her (naked) body on screen as pre-emptive against critiques of her size (Woods 2015: 40). It was perhaps due to HBO's emphasis on Dunham's humour, with, self-reflexivity, and comic timing, as well as the frontal positioning of Judd Apatow as executive producer of *Girls* in this early cycle of promotion, that arguably undermined and threatened Dunham's authenticity as female showrunner (Nygaard 2013, Woods 2015). As Nygaard argues, drawing on these elements attempted to align Dunham with HBO's quality (otherwise male) auteurist tradition, failed to highlight her commentary on feminine issues and themes (2013: 372-73). Despite this, however, Dunham's distinct ironic and satirical tone was firmly established at the outset; intensified by the synergy between Dunham's "real" and "fictional" selves.

Feeding off assumptions that Dunham's arguably semi-autobiographical subject matter forms the basis for some of the narrative content in *Girls*, the initial media buzz

surrounding the series played on her character's opium-induced confession to her parents: labelling Dunham as the "voice of my generation. Or, at least *a* voice, of *a* generation" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot'). Some negative readings came in the form of quite severe, vitriolic criticisms of Hannah's inflated self-entitlement and were mirrored by criticisms of Dunham and her own privileged connections; serving to blur author and character within a wider paratextual framing of *Girls* (Woods 2015: 41). As I have discussed thus far in this chapter, Dunham unapologetically works from within the same privileged cultural parameters that are subject to media scrutiny. What Dunham's fictional creation of Hannah allows for, then, is a dramatic arena in which to reflect upon such issues of gender, class, and privilege. This results in a specific feminist address strongly driven by the articulation between these different planes of authorship. Furthermore, within this arena, such trenchant criticisms feed back into *Girls*' narrative landscape; thus opening up a space for dialogue, as well as a self-reflexive meta-narrative of popular culture. By anticipating potential criticisms of *Girls*, Dunham demonstrates her literacy of the discourses surrounding her work and uses her fictional performance as Hannah to engage in this dialogue. Similarly, Woods notes the importance of Dunham's comedy in creating 'a space to think through the contradictions and challenges of contemporary femininity and women's place in television' (2015: 39). Even in its title, *Girls* acknowledges its inability to meet media expectations through its use of this often pejorative term, while also knowingly inscribing certain popular inflections of feminism, like girl power.

As outlined in the introductory section of this thesis, girl power is deeply entangled with the rhetoric of choice and empowerment through consumption (Whelehan 2000, Riordan 2001, Hopkins 2002, Harris 2004, Walter 2010); both contributing to and sustaining postfeminism (Projansky 2007) in ways which potentially deradicalise and depoliticise its messages. Borrowing from Stuart Hall's influential terminology of disarticulation, McRobbie defines 'feminist disarticulation' in order to understand how some of the institutional gains made by feminism over the past 30 years are now being eroded by such inflections of 'faux feminism' (2009: 24). This disarticulation operates through widespread dissemination of values which typecast feminism as misogynist and

irrelevant in light of new freedoms for women – particularly sexual freedoms (McRobbie 2009: 26). These new gender powers, according to McRobbie, are most embedded within the field of popular culture; pre-emptively displacing potential solidarities between women even before any threat from the feminist movement can emerge (2009: 27). Girl power and other manifestations of the 'post-feminist masquerade' promote celebratory individualist discourses of empowerment and personal choice which principally locate power and female identity in the body, encouraging constant self-management, self-judgement and self-beratement; thus working to restore hegemonic cultural norms instead of challenging patriarchal structures (McRobbie 2009: 67-8). As Susan J. Douglas notes, girls and women are pulled in opposite directions in the commanding crosscurrents of this contradictory cultural zeitgeist: offered fantasies of power and success in the workplace, equality and respect in the home – we can be anything we want to be if we work hard [or 'lean in' (Sandberg 2013)] – but we are simultaneously punished for not doing femininity 'right' – thus forging 'a perfect and allegedly empowering compromise between feminism and femininity' (2010: 16-7).

In the context of neoliberalism, girls are figures of ambivalence, represented in contemporary media culture through the oscillation between 'can-do' and 'at-risk' narratives (Harris 2004). The 'can-do' version of girlhood provides 'a fantasy of promise' whereby if girls work hard and avoid becoming 'at-risk', they can achieve anything – particularly in neoliberal consumer culture whereby happiness and achievement, or 'girl power', are available to anyone who embodies 'can-do' status through career, fashion, and lifestyle choices (Projansky 2014: 5). But *Girls* acknowledges the limitations of this dichotomy and looks for the messiness in between. As noted by Fuller and Driscoll, girls and women are consistently objects of concern within scholarship on postfeminism, but as they go on to argue, rather than simply (re)presenting the fantasies of girls' freedoms as ultimately unsatisfying in ways that bring about what McRobbie terms 'the undoing of feminism' (2009: 55), *Girls* instead employs postfeminism as a 'productive irritation' that compels continuing conversations about feminism in a changing social situation (2015: 253-54). In this sense, ''post-' is just the current name for feminism's long struggle to

remain visibly relevant to changing conditions' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 261). Hannah's aspirations to become a writer are crucial here, as this narrative thread helps to craft a meta-criticism of popular culture's idealised representations of girls and women; signalling to the gendered experiences of these changing social conditions, particularly in relation to work.

The 'precarious creative labour' undertaken by Hannah and her friends in order to get by in New York (although sometimes subsidised by their privileged social networks (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 261)), shows how the notion of meritocracy in a post-recession context is seen to be failing even the privileged members of society; of which paints a very different picture to the 'glamorous stability shown a decade earlier in Sex and the City' (Littler 2017). As Mark Fisher argues, while work functioned to the characters on *Sex and the City* as a 'silent background to their pleasures and misadventures', work is a central focus for the 'graduates without a future' on *Girls* (2014). They continually face losing jobs, exploitation through unpaid internships, low-paid domestic roles such as being a nanny, awkward and unsuccessful job interviews, and the realisation that a successful career is more likely to be found overseas.

Fisher forthrightly notes, Grumpy's café is significant in that it is both a central location in the series and a source of employment for Hannah and many of the other characters at different points in the series (2014). Grumpy's is managed by Ray (Alex Karpovsky), who is seemingly just as confused in his stumbles towards an idealised future as the girls are, despite being older and more mature. Even the name of his café helps paint a picture of the dismal realities underpinning this casual work, in that it offers very little towards the career aspirations of these characters. Granted that *Sex and the City* follows women who have already '"figured out work and friends" and are looking "to nail family life" (Dunham in Goldberg 2012), but *Girls* addresses the gulf between these generations; these girls are treading an already unsteady terrain towards womanhood, made even more precarious by the troubling economic context. As Nash and Whelehan argue, 'Dunham's project can be interpreted as a quest for new ways of thinking about

how women navigate female destiny in a post-recession context where postfeminist choice narratives ring hollow' (2017: 2).

The conditions for Hannah's creative work in an austerity economy are so fraught with insecurity and anxiety that even her joy at receiving an e-book deal slowly descends into misery and obsessive-compulsive disorder as a result of unrealistic deadlines and demands from her publishers, who only wish to profit from her self-exploitative revelations (Fisher 2014). Unlike canonical female coming of age narratives, where growth is signalled by relocation to the city, Hannah must "jitter her way through her twenties" (Season 1, Episode 6) in "a place that doesn't even want [her]" (Season 1, Episode 6) (Bell 2013: 365-67). Rather than Hannah's desire to write simply being about 'not wanting to work' and exploiting the gains from previous feminist battles through her 'postfeminist entitlement' (DeCarvalho 2013: 368), *Girls* readily critiques the forms of work currently available to girls (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 261). Not only calling up the ways in which popular culture has historically disseminated feminism and kept it at the forefront of debating our 'contemporary anxieties', the most important element of *Girls* is its ability to recognise cultural criticism (specifically that levelled against the series itself) as an integral part of the conversations about these contemporary anxieties (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 261). This reflexive critical dialogue is affirmatively feminist in itself and highly significant in its address as it draws from Dunham's work as a female writer and her own millennial coming of age.

As Maša Grdešić has shown, certain narrative elements in *Girls* foreshadows critics' complaints with the series and with women's popular culture more generally; making it 'highly self-conscious and attuned to criticism, and therefore deeply political' (2013: 358). Pronounced metafictional elements such as Hannah's halting attempt at writing her memoir in the first season, for instance, ironically draws attention to *Girls* as fiction; nodding towards media discourses positioning the series as a semi-autobiographical work through Dunham's involvement. Hannah insists that she cannot write more essays until she has "lived them first" (Season 1, Episode 1, 'Pilot'), so that the material for her memoir advances the action of the series while what happens in the series becomes the memoir

itself (Grdešić 2013: 357). The experiences she has 'lived', in fact, *do* become the subject for her writing, both in *Girls* and elsewhere.

In the final season, for example, as Hannah's career as a writer begins to flourish, the opening scene of the very first episode ('All I Ever Wanted') shows her work published in *The New York Times.* With a piece entitled 'Losing My Best Friend to My Ex-Boyfriend', Hannah charts her reasons for terminating her friendship with Jessa as a result of her relationship with Hannah's ex-boyfriend, Adam (Adam Driver); a significant plot line carried forward from the previous two seasons. Indeed, Dunham's status, talent, and work ethic are already assured through her real-life achievements as a writer, thus underwriting arguments that use Hannah's fruitless writing and professional failures in early seasons of *Girls* as indication of Dunham's own postfeminist entitlement (Dejmanee 2016a: 129). Dunham's first op-ed piece about threats against access to birth control in America for *The New York Times* on 9 June 2017, also assures that this is a real-life craft and that her work is political both on and off screen. Moreover, these different platforms are crucial to the dissemination of her feminist voice and the ways that it articulates with *Girls*' distinct feminist address. As such, I shall now go on to discuss the significance of Dunham's memoir to further an understanding of the series' self-reflexive criticality.

'No such thing as too much information': Mapping Dunham's Planes of Authorship

Dunham's book *Not That Kind of Girl* further extends her political work and functions as an important part of her transmedia authorship. A showrunner's increased public persona relies on such paratexts to surround and augment a television series across media (Mittell 2015: 101) and thus allows for more entry points to Dunham's feminist narrative. This intertextuality is also expressed visually. In its adoption of similar tonal and aesthetic elements familiar to *Girls*, *Not That Kind of Girl* is noticeably a part of Dunham's self-reflexive feminist narrative. The book's cover is emblazoned with a similar bold typeface and knowingly "feminine" (read: pink) colour palette, indicative of the typography used in *Girls*' title screen. The various title cards are incredibly short, featuring the thin, capitalised typeface against different plain and patterned backgrounds, also utilising various colour

combinations. Designed by Howard Nourmand, who has since gone on to work with Dunham and Konner on a forthcoming *Lenny Letter* project, these title cards are used following the opening scene of each episode 'as a sting to articulate a punchline – usually the crescendo to a discussion riddled with angst and ennui' (Cartwright 2017). This 'graphic identity' is rather minimal, choosing to forego the 'drawn-out, cinematic title sequences' of its TV contemporaries for something more immediate, because '*Girls* always starts with a bang' (Cartwright 2017). The chosen typography is supposedly a product of Dunham's love for 'art deco' but her personal instructions to Nourmand, which stipulated that his work evoke 'weird and intimate spaces, and off-beat visuals atypical for a show about young women' (Smith 2012), is suggestive of her wider metatextual approach seeking to push the boundaries of female representation. Even the capitalisation of the title 'gobbles up the entire screen' in a way that 'kind of reclaim[s] it' for its own purpose (Danes 2012); knowingly undercutting problematic connotations attached to the word 'girl' in as much as it invokes them.

Ford locates these 'low-key aesthetics' within the shared style and sensibility of smart television, which like smart cinema, 'generally depicts white middle-class protagonists using ironic distance, blank style, and a low-key aesthetic' (2016: 1034). It is through the use of such conventions that *Girls* performs its feminism, employing irony and satire to communicate that it does not invoke postfeminism uncritically, but continually draws attention to how privilege operates (Ford 2016: 1032-34) in order to challenge our understandings of these discourses (Bell 2013). These moments of reflexivity in *Girls* are reliant on the collapse between Dunham's authorial voice and that of her character's, for it enables critical commentaries about Dunham and her work to feed back into the narrative landscape of the series via metatextual devices that are specifically focused on Hannah's writing, such as her diary and her tweets (Grdešić 2013: 357). This collapse is exemplified in the episode 'Leave Me Alone', as Hannah's boss Ray, in mirroring common gendered criticisms levelled at women's personal writing, asks her if there is "anything real" that she can write about because "[w]hat in the world could be more trivial than intimacy?" (Season 1, Episode 9). According to Ray, "real" subjects of writing include acid rain, racial profiling,

divorce, and death, and not the sentimental, personal thoughts about Hannah's relationship with a hoarder. Even Marnie describes her best friend's essay as "whiny" (Season 1, Episode 9, 'Leave Me Alone'). Later in the episode, Hannah attends a writing circle and rather than reading aloud the criticised essay, she instead presents a newer work written in haste about the death of her Internet boyfriend, which was not well received by her audience. The episode cleverly foreshadows some critics' complaints with the series who simply dismissed or were unsure of how to react to Dunham's acute observations about female intimacy (Grdešić 2013: 357-58). The narrative in *Girls* is repeatedly penetrated with ironic and satirical responses to these gendered criticisms; the effects of which have more bite when calling up criticisms of a personal nature.

The frankness with which Dunham relays her gendered experiences of growing up in *Not That Kind of Girl* has been met with arguably anti-feminist criticisms, which regard her writing as a self-indulgent, masturbatory approach. In her review of the book for *The Guardian*, Hadley Freeman employs what she calls a 'constructive comparison' between Dunham and the work of American writer and comedian, David Sedaris (2014). Hailing Sedaris for his unique 'outward' perspective on the world in his writings about himself, his family, and his neuroses, Freeman lambasts Dunham's 'inward' approach to her own intimate personal life: 'reading this book feels a little like being squashed up inside her bellybutton. […] There's sexual honesty, and then there's just sticking your head up your vagina.' Although Freeman respects Dunham's craft, admitting that she is 'a skilled writer', it is the level of intimacy in relation to her own body – namely her genitalia – which is the main point of critique for the feminist columnist (2014). Freeman's (2014) rather crude and seemingly policing response to Dunham's intimate reflections also echoes similar responses that *Girls* itself received, highlighting the unfamiliar territory Dunham has traversed in her probing of female sexual subjecthood on screen; particularly in the ways that her own "unconventional" naked or semi-naked body appears so frequently in the series.

This 'authentic' vision of female (sexual) experience is marked by a comedy of discomfort and intimacy; articulated, in part, through Dunham's affect and physicality

(Woods 2015: 42; see also Marghitu and Ng 2013, Ford 2016). Ford argues that this physicality aligns Dunham in a long line of what Kathleen Rowe Karlyn (1995) has termed 'female grotesques', who refuse to tame their "unruly" bodies, defined by their features of excess and looseness (in Ford 2016: 1036).[27] Dunham's body politics extend beyond this unruliness, however, with a sexual verisimilitude produced through 'smart tropes' of blankness, and low-key aesthetics of stillness and tableau staging (Ford 2016: 1037). Drawn-out silences and long takes, where 'the camera lingers on the act of sex itself', intensifies the awkwardness of certain sexual encounters; thus reinforcing the idea of mundanity and blankness (Ford 2016: 1038). Dunham seeks to normalise female experience in *Girls*, as Stefania Marghitu and Conrad Ng argue: viewers are routinely confronted with 'the possibility of women's bodies not being titillating so much as simply existing on television', with female nudity appearing 'normalised' alongside the subtext of characters' emotional turmoil (2013: 114). Moments of female bonding are also solidified through the integration of humour via bodily functions, making nudity merely circumstantial to the narrative (Marghitu and Ng 2013: 114). In the touching concluding scene of Season 2, Episode 4, 'It's a Shame About Ray', for example, Hannah comforts a crying Jessa following the disintegration of her marriage. Breaking a lengthy silence wherein Hannah simply places her hand on her friend's knee, Jessa disposes of the snot from her nose in the bath water in which the two girls are sitting together, initiating shared laughter between the two friends.

Of course, the media commentaries about Dunham's body and the body politics of the series have 'played out on a much broader canvas than just *Girls*' given her status as a celebrity (Ford 2016: 1036). Similarly, Woods notes: 'Dunham is positioned throughout as an 'oversharer', with her strong online presence feeding into a complex celebrity persona, which blended an 'authenticity' articulated through *Girls'* affect and physicality, with the glamour of Dunham's New York lifestyle' (2015: 43). Returning to how Dunham represents herself in online spaces later, 'the cultural blurring of herself and Hannah'

[27] Author cites Rowe Karlyn (1995) *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter*. (Austin: Texas University Press).

(Woods 2015: 43) is further cemented by her candidness, which appears to be a consistent thread across her different projects – written and performed – in a way that refuses to filter what is discussed and how it is discussed. Dunham deals with female intimacy in *Not That Kind of Girl* with the same candour as in *Girls*, or to put it another way, she gets 'as naked in print as her alter ego Hannah often does in the flesh' (Kakutani 2014). But rather than dismissing different facets of Dunham's creative work and performance (*Girls*, *Tiny Furniture*, and *Not That Kind of Girl*) as three versions of the same autobiography, with the latter as no more than a bid to 'cash in' on, and further extend her exposure (Freeman 2014), like Taylor (2016: 253), I position this consistency across platforms as the product of much labour – of much *feminist* labour. Corresponding with the previous chapter, the gendered work of the celebrity identity in the text underscores its politics. What is more, here, Dunham's critical responses to this seeming gendered scrutiny, particularly accusations of over-sharing, are reciprocated via her different planes of authorship and performance, thus attaching further significance to *Girls* as a feminist text.

Bell argues that the self-reflexive address in *Girls*, 'which wavers between biting and tender, demonstrates promise and invites dialogue' (2013: 366). In perhaps one of the most self-reflexive episodes from Season 4, Dunham directly addresses some of the criticisms aimed at her writing through her performance as Hannah. Episode 2, 'Triggering', follows Hannah as she settles into her new life outside of New York as she attends the University of Iowa as part of their prestigious Writer's Workshop graduate programme. In her first seminar, Hannah reads part of her fictional story aloud to the other students in the class. Anticipating her writing to 'trigger' strong emotional reactions from her audience by prefacing her reading with a warning, Hannah is shocked when she receives largely negative, even sexist criticisms of the piece. Her account of a tattooed 25-year-old's seemingly abusive sexual relationship with a man is pulled apart by the class for its "privileged" and "stunted feminist ideas", as well as its insensitivity towards sufferers of abuse. Further, Hannah is identified by her peers as "very much this character" in her story, with one student distinguishing the presumed personal, semi-autobiographical

nature to be his “problem” with her writing. In this almost painfully witty, cleverly crafted scene, Dunham mirrors the gendered critiques of her own written work.

In a passage from *Not That Kind of Girl*, for instance, Dunham recalls a moment of sexual curiosity in which she examines her 1-year-old sister’s genitals, frankly and candidly describing it as ‘within the spectrum of things that I did’ (2014a: 121). This passage, as well as excerpts that describe how Dunham would bribe her sister for attention (‘Basically, anything a sexual predator might do to woo a small suburban girl, I was trying’ (Dunham 2014a: 150)), led to an accusatory onslaught from both online and offline (mostly conservative) media, even labelling such self-disclosure as an indication of sexual abuse (see, for example, Thomas 2014a and Williamson 2014). Dunham later released a statement in which she apologises for her ‘comic use’ of the term ‘sexual predator’ and that her intention was not for her book to be ‘painful’ or ‘triggering’ for her readers (Dunham 2014c). Dunham (2014c) also notes that these excerpts were published with the approval of her sister, Grace Dunham.

Grace herself, challenges the ‘heteronormative’ agenda of the state and media that she argues ‘deems certain behaviours harmful, and others “normal”, which she openly rejects: ‘As a queer person: i’m committed to people narrating their own experiences, determining for themselves what has and has not been harmful’ (Grace Dunham (@simongdunham) November 3, 2014)’ (in Flood 2014). A more thorough analysis of the moral implications of this particular aspect of Dunham’s work is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what this does highlight is the often jarring, uncomfortable spaces that her work occupies. Gay, in a written response to this matter, reflects on the ‘uncomfortable’ nature of memoir itself, in that, ‘through the writer’s choice to expose certain parts of themselves, we are inherently invited to judge those lives’ (2014d). As she admits, the two women are friends, but Gay (2014d) notes her disappointment at the lack of diversity portrayed in *Girls*, while standing by her positive review of Dunham’s book. She found the passage about Dunham’s sister ‘disturbing and utterly bizarre’ but admitted to not making a particular note about it ‘because within the context of the entire book, the disclosure made sense’ (Gay 2014d). In Gay’s conclusion she notes that Dunham is ‘a woman who

is intelligent and talented and funny and who is also privileged and short-sighted on some big issues we all care about so much' (2014d). Indeed, it is precisely the contradictory nature of her feminist labour which open up Dunham's performance to such ambivalence; thus making it difficult to determine whether this is a labour of care or whether this can be construed as cleverly crafted to generate publicity.

The ambivalence noted here could be as much about Hannah as it is about Dunham. Going back to 'Triggering', as if echoing Gay's stance on how Dunham's disclosures in her memoir were taken 'so utterly without context' (2014d), Hannah defends her work against charges that it trivialises abuse, stating: "That was just one paragraph" (Season 4, Episode 2). Hannah struggles to remain silent while her peers deliver their opinions, continually raising her hand in a childish manner in an effort to make her interruptions appear more acceptable, while chewing loudly on her snacks. Dunham appears to be explicitly dissecting her own initial responses to the critiques of her written work, which she later described in her written statement as a 'rage spiral' (Dunham 2014c). On the other hand, Dunham is unwavering in her right to tell her own personal story. Notably, another female student voices what she believes to be the "larger issue", in that she is not sure how to critique a work that she believes to be based "directly from the author's personal experience" (Season 4, Episode 2, 'Triggering'). Strategically, it is the most praised (male) student in the class who everyone agrees with: "if it's about her, so what? Who fucking cares? This is *her* voice. This is who she is. We can't squash her voice of what she's trying to say" (Season 4, Episode 2). When another (male) student in the class questions the "lack of sympathy towards the male perspective" in the way Hannah's story seemingly deals with abuse, Hannah can no longer remain silent despite the persistence from the seminar leader to keep things orderly: "History. History didn't focus on the female perspective" (Season 4, Episode 2, 'Triggering'). In this self-reflexive meta-critique, Dunham not only mirrors the gendered criticisms of her work, but directly *challenges* them, as well as the wider culture in which they are entrenched, through her performance as Hannah.

Dunham's scripting here arguably evokes a postfeminist rhetoric. Using the classroom as a platform, her performance channels the same kind of '"in-your-face," confrontational attitude' (Shugart et al. 2001: 195) that can be considered a hallmark of a third wave, postfeminist sensibility (Gill 2007). Empowerment, in this sense, is about 'having the power to make choices, regardless of what these choices are' as well as a '[v]igorous assertion of one's own individuality' (Shugart et al. 2001: 195). Even the title, in and of itself, acknowledges the loaded politics of this appropriation. But rather than merely applying this language in order to simply reinscribe and recontextualise certain elements of a postfeminist sensibility without question or political cognisance, (as has been argued of some postmodern mediated sites of popular culture (Shugart et al. 2001)), *Girls* takes this further by critically contributing to and intervening in such dialogues about feminisms and their media (re)presentations. At work here is Fuller and Driscoll's theorisation of postfeminism in the series as a 'productive irritation', in a way that is 'continually recalibrating the present tense of feminism' (2015: 253-255).

Probing issues of gender, power, and consent are central to Dunham's depiction of contemporary female experience, with Hannah's writing as just one way in which these complex feminist issues permeate the narrative. As Ferreday argues of the post-recession, post-Internet media culture within which *Girls* exists, representations of sex and violence are often grittier and more ambivalent than 'the shiny-happy aesthetic' of earlier postfeminist representations, sometimes making it unclear as to whether these offer a backlash against feminist ideas or an embrace of them (2015a). Following the seminar in another awkward scene from 'Triggering', Hannah admits that her not-so-fictional story is in fact about a drug-induced encounter with her boyfriend where she asked him to punch her in the chest, causing evident discomfort to her classmate who grimaces at this level of self-disclosure. But as Hannah sees it: "TMI is such an out-dated concept. There's no such thing as too much information. This is the Information Age. We're all just here to express ourselves and so to censor each other? We're no better than George W. Bush" (Season 4, Episode 2, 'Triggering'). 'TMI' as a notably gendered notion (Sykes 2015) is rejected in *Girls* and refracted in other of Dunham's projects, such as *Lenny Letter*, which

as I shall go on to discuss, takes its premise from Hannah's words: 'An email newsletter where there's no such thing as too much information'. In Dunham's work, then, whether as herself or as Hannah, feminine intimacies, however confusing and uncomfortable, are not sanitised or glossed over, in ways that actively *refuse* feminine pathologisation and the shaming of women (Gill 2017b: 232 [original emphasis]). The myriad sexual dynamics depicted in *Girls* are observed as breaking new ground (Ford 2016, Nash and Grant 2016, Waters 2017), demanding an engagement with the complexities and ambivalences of consent (Gill 2017b). As discussed in relation to Dunham, however, the representations of these muddied boundaries have been fraught with controversy.

Perhaps most notable in relation to *Girls* is the public reaction to 'On All Fours' (Season 2, Episode 9), in which Adam orders his girlfriend Natalia (Shiri Appleby) to crawl on her hands and knees to his bed and has sex with her, leaving her visibly degraded and extremely uncomfortable. Nash and Grant argue that the difficulty in categorising this scene as a depiction of rape or not is the whole point, for it speaks in an unprecedented manner to the often unspoken, not to mention unmediated, realities of young women's sexual experiences (2015: 984). As Amanda Hess captures concisely: '"No means no," but it is not the only measure of consent' (2013). Adam and Natalia's encounter grapples with these complexities by showing that women may not always be sure whether rape has occurred, particularly if the man in question is known to them (Nash and Grant 2015: 984). These 'masterful' feminist narratives spotlight the grey areas not so easily positioned along the familiar binary between 'liberation' or 'sexual empowerment'; depicting feminine heterosexuality 'as an endless negotiation of objectification and subjectification' unfamiliar to the arguably more 'fantastical' representations in *Sex and the City* (Nash and Grant 2015: 985). Also testament to these shifting times is the ways in which *Girls* addresses the significance of online spaces in negotiating and mapping such gendered issues in the present moment.

As I have unpacked thus far in this chapter, Dunham's self-reflexive craft, permeating the narrative of *Girls* using cutting irony and adept meta-critique, makes space for these negotiations by engaging with real criticism of her own work. Episodes like

'Triggering' are exemplary of the elasticity of these narratives, as *Girls* can be seen as 'both the ultimate obsession of think-piece culture and its most astute chronicler' (Poniewozik in Wortham 2017). Woods aptly titled it as 'The show that launched a thousand blogs' (2013), also describing elsewhere how *Girls* became 'a valuable cultural object in on-going discourses' – particularly in the 'online scene' (Woods 2015: 38, 45). Hannah's civilised face-off with esteemed and successful author Chuck Palmer (Matthew Ryhs) in the standalone episode 'American Bitch' (Season 6, Episode 3), takes this play on the collapse between Hannah/ Dunham to its most acute in terms of acknowledging *Girls*'/ Dunham's place within this online culture.

Hannah meets with Palmer at his apartment upon his request to discuss an article she had written about him for a feminist website, which explains her disappointment to hear that her favourite novelist has allegedly abused his fame to take sexual advantage of several college-aged women during his book tour. Palmer defends his innocence, arguing that all of his sexual encounters were consensual; positing that these "Tumblr girls" simply need an experience to write about regardless of whether or not there is any truth in their words. He praises her writing but tells her: "You should be using your funny to tackle subjects that matter." Hannah affirms that the gendered power imbalance of these sexual encounters – the privilege that Palmer's status and gender affords him over these younger, more vulnerable women – are not enough to excuse the seediness of his acts even despite consent. Further, she stands by her right to elevate the voices of these marginalised women who are speaking out about this, "not so she has a story but so she feels like she exists." Dismissing his power and privilege in the face of the "muddied", "grey areas" of sexuality, Hannah relays her disgust in such arguments by telling Palmer of her experiences of being groomed by her fifth-grade teacher.

Up to this point the episode appears almost transparent in its self-awareness of Dunham and the issues that surround her public identity: feminism, celebrity, privilege, authorship, and privacy. As Murray notes, Dunham can be seen to be holding Hannah at an ironic distance, here; extending a self-policing that recognises her own political failures to act out the feminist beliefs she has shown to be familiar with: 'a cypher to explore the

contradictions of being the postfeminist-feminist' that both Dunham and Hannah act out (2017: 5). Further bolstering this is the episode's examination of the very real dangers of Internet culture, sexual assault, literary ethics, and the censorship of voices that speak out against establishment-based privilege. The parallels with Dunham's own experience of sexual assault, which she writes about in her memoir, are also notable for their poignant relevance. Writing about an incident which occurred on campus while studying at university, Dunham introduces herself as an 'unreliable narrator' (Dunham 2014a: 51); speaking to the difficulties of articulating, or even identifying experiences as rape, and how the same language can be appropriated *against* victims of assault. The real 'cunning' of 'American Bitch', as Nussbaum writes, in part, comes from the explicit acknowledgement of the grey areas which inherently provide the fuel for *Girls*' 'dark-comic engine': 'Through Hannah, Dunham gets to paint a picture of her own house and then paint herself into it' (2017). [28]

Dunham's public and outspoken persona is closely knit with *Girls* as a representational text. As I have articulated in relation to 'Triggering' (Season 4, Episode 2), the strong, polarising reactions that Dunham's public and outspoken persona sometimes provokes are written in to the representational strategies of *Girls*, meaning that this text cannot be treated as autonomous. But in *this* particular scenario, it is not Hannah who stands in for Dunham, it is Palmer; his public and private life is both lauded and loathed, for which he seeks understanding. As Kathryn VanArendonk explains, it is gender that cleverly twists the debate in this episode, pushing it beyond a simple identification with Dunham's circumstances: 'Hannah's account of being rubbed by her fifth-grade teacher is a more specific indictment of a paternalistic, culturally protected breed of privilege […] that values male attention as the only way to demonstrate worthiness' (2017) This is a lucid critique, not only of privilege – but of *male* privilege.

[28] Murray observes what she calls a 'fracturing' of Dunham's transmedia voice, which she argues is brought to the fore through the discrepancy between Dunham's personal testimony of rape on the one hand, and the problematic treatment of sexual violence in *Girls* on the other (2017: 9). This indeed raises questions about the feminist ambivalence to which Dunham and *Girls* contributes.

Marking a turning point in the tone of this episode is when Palmer begins to win Hannah over because he seemingly sympathises with her experience of abuse, compliments her writing, and attempts to get to know her. While in his bedroom they bond over their literary interests, with Palmer presenting Hannah with his signed copy of Philip Roth's *When She Was Good* (1967) as a gift. These links to literary idols and their own sullied reputations, Palmer's accolades, his photograph with Toni Morrison, and reference to reviews of his work in "the *Times*", anchors *Girls* to the real via metafictional devices, familiar in previous seasons (Grdešić 2013); facilitating an important dialogue about the series' own politics. The lens is inherently self-reflexive and critical in *Girls* (Bell 2013), but in its isolation as a standalone episode, 'American Bitch' knowingly positions itself as a critique in and of itself. As VanArendonk puts it: 'we feel like we've suddenly been taken behind the curtain, beyond fiction […] This isn't *Girls* anymore. It's an essay about *Girls*' (2017).

But a request from Palmer that Hannah lay down with him on his bed suddenly reminds us that we *are* watching *Girls*. Palmer's invitation is initially met with some hesitation from Hannah, but she eventually agrees. Turning to face her, he places his exposed penis on her leg, which she holds on to despite her visible shock and (arguably naïve) surprise at this turn of events. The noticeable plasticity of Rhys's prosthetic penis also provides a nod to this fictional framing. She jumps off the bed, but before she could leave, Hannah is stuck watching Palmer's daughter's flute recital, dumbfounded by her naïveté that is, perhaps, shared by the audience. Moreover, as Hannah leaves the apartment, the blurred background around her reveals several young women flocking into Palmer's apartment building. Seemingly interchangeable and unexceptional along with all these other women, Palmer puts Hannah 'back into the concord of voices, [making her] another creative girl with a story that she can never tell' (Nussbaum 2017) – thus the fictional world once again seems to fall away. The potency of this meta-critique but also how it is seamlessly interwoven with Hannah's own narrative, fuels the socio-political charge of this series.

Within the framing of this episode it is the changing perceptions of Hannah's character that are equal, if not more important than, those of Palmer. Her calm and collected demeanour throughout the episode appears uncharacteristic of Hannah in a way which seems to lack continuity within the series' trajectory: 'The Hannah in "American Bitch" feels more like Lena Dunham, in her ideas if not her biography' (Nussbaum 2017). At the start of the episode, Hannah tells Palmer that as a writer she is "obligated to use my voice to talk about things that are meaningful to me"; thus mirroring Dunham's committed use of her platform to elevate other feminist voices as well as her own. It is only when Hannah jumps from the bed – "Oh my fucking God, I touched your dick!" – that we recognise the flawed, messy human being that we are familiar with. But Palmer's complaints about the struggles with his public image are also meant to be taken seriously, regardless of his immense privilege and sullied reputation: "I'm not perfect but I'm not saying I'm perfect […] there are kids dying in Africa but this is hard for me." Beneath the surface of the episode, and the impressive interior of Palmer's lavish apartment, is a dark underbelly – a mess created by two narcissists that simply cannot be cleaned up (Nussbaum 2017).

As this chapter explicates, the Hannah/ Palmer dynamic articulates with Dunham's public profile, which insists on imperfections as part of a branded identity. Indeed, it is part of this brand that we accept Dunham's failings and it is here that problems arise: due to the raced, classed, and gendered nature of the different parts of a public engagement, it is often difficult to reconcile Dunham's 'imperfect brand' with a feminist position – leading to charges that affiliate her identity with a 'quasi-feminism' (McRobbie 2015: 12). The broader question underpinning this analysis is how such a narcissistic perspective may be reconciled with the work of a political, social movement. As discussed here, Dunham rejects the narrow boundaries of "good" and "bad" feminism as reductive; *Girls* animates the grey areas in between these binaries through characters who represent the complexity of human experience, who are not necessarily guided by moral imperatives or aspirational qualities. As Fuller and Driscoll argue, the demand for 'feminist social realism' hinges on this narrow representational bind, which buttresses a gendered double standard (2015:

261). Moreover, from Dunham's experience, it seems that this demand is aimed more at those who choose to foreground their feminism (McCann 2017: 95). Nonetheless, the significance of these tensions are brought to the fore most prominently upon consideration of Dunham's use of other media platforms.

As with *Girls*, Dunham uses other creative outputs, such as *Lenny Letter, Women of the Hour*, and Instagram, to engage with the complicated politics surrounding her authorship. Her persona-building across these different platforms, however, also facilitates a resistance to the policing of female narratives – a stance that Dunham communicates clearly in *Girls* through the aesthetic and narrative techniques discussed above. Dunham's multifaceted position at the helm of *Girls*, alongside her other creative, women-centred projects – the visibility of which are maintained and elevated predominantly via social and other digital media platforms – work to augment her (problematic) feminist position. With reference to these digital projects, to conclude this chapter it is important to shift the focus back to Dunham as a celebrity to discuss the tricky politics and wider significance of her feminist agenda in such commercialised, capitalist arenas of culture.

'Doing her best with what she's got': Dunham's Digital Labour

Dunham's status as a celebrity is now interchangeable with her status as a feminist. Although her 'blockbuster' literary work *Not That Kind of Girl* can be seen as a significant vehicle for securing and buttressing the feminism now central to her public identity, Dunham's celebrity precedes this recognition (Taylor 2016: 235). This is not to say that Dunham's life had not been informed by feminism before her fame, especially as the daughter of Laurie Simmons, whose work as an artist, photographer, and filmmaker explores feminist themes. Likewise, feminism is a central theme in Dunham's creative projects (for example, *Girls*, *Lenny Letter*, *Women of the Hour*), making her public figuration a 'complex amalgam' between those whose fame is a direct product of their feminism, and those who later proclaim feminism as part of their celebrity identity (Taylor 2016: 236).

During the initial promotional cycles for *Girls*, Dunham's gendered authorship oscillated within a discourse focused on the construction of her auteur status and star identity (Woods 2015: 42), and as I have illustrated in depth here, this oscillation is effectively used to frame narrative content within the series. Expectations from both popular and academic critics that *Girls* would be 'the Perfect Feminist TV Series' – not a standard to which all television series are held – were complicated by Dunham's star identity, which was associated with a 'white hipster' privilege, coupled with the failings of *Girls* to represent accurately the diversity of Brooklyn (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 255). Feminist critiques of the series responded to its explicit feminist content, as well as Dunham's public affirmations of such a position, meaning that assumptions about *Girls*' ambivalent feminism were often extended to her status as a celebrity feminist (Taylor 2016: 250). In other words, the whiteness of *Girls* was seen to be a product of Dunham's 'White Girl Feminism' (Ayres-Deets 2013).

The interweaving of Dunham's own life experiences with her politics not only defines her feminism but the controversy that surrounds it. As Nash and Whelehan proffer, it could be Dunham's self-declared and outspoken feminism that partly engendered such high expectations of *Girls*: 'it is something of a tradition to lambast feminist artists who are not inclusive in their representations of women's lives' (2017: 2). As Shelley Cobb has shown in relation to the 'male celebrity feminist', there is a clear gendered dimension to such criticism, as it is the feminist ideals and politics of women which are most fiercely contested (2015: 136-37). At the same time, however, if *Girls* is intended to be Dunham's own 'feminist 'mission statement'', then there is legitimate cause to interrogate its focus on white middle-class young women (Nash and Whelehan 2017: 2). As the title of their recently edited collection testifies – *Reading Lena Dunham's Girls* – the series' 'controversial edginess that intrigues and repels in equal measure' is tied to Dunham's 'presence' in its creation, and the feminist critiques that surround it (2017: 3). Dunham herself has spoken about the personal and "heated" dimensions of this criticism, which often equated her failings with 'racism'; leaving her feeling "frozen" in terms of how to respond without her comments being misread or used as "bits of Twitter fodder" (in q on

cbc 2014). Facilitating her 'presence' and complex celebrity persona are such online platforms (Wood 2015: 43), which Dunham uses to shape and extend her (controversial) feminist identity and performance.

Social media and the Internet act as a canvas for certain narratives in *Girls*, which as a feminist text, seeks to interrogate female experience in a millennial generation. The significance attached to Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and online news sites, is arguably influenced by Dunham's own experiences as a millennial woman, coming of age in the public gaze. James Poniewozik notes that Hannah's story is really 'the coming-of-age of a writer scrabbling for exposure in the era of oversharing, confession and comments sections' (in Wortham 2017). Digital platforms act as catalysts for the advancement of central plot developments (Grdešić 2013: 357), foregrounding the impact of these technologies to an understanding of the self. 'All Adventurous Women Do' (Season 1, Episode 3) is a titular reference to one of Hannah's tweets as she reflects on the news that her ex-boyfriend from college, Elija (Andrew Rannells), is gay. Elsewhere, 'Beach House' (Season 2, Episode 7) captures the realities of navigating modern friendships using social media, as Marnie's longing for "healing" seems, in part, to be driven by a desire to appear happy and connected via these platforms: "Guys, we're so disconnected now. I thought that this would be a nice opportunity to have fun together and, ya know, prove to everyone via Instagram that we can still have fun together as a group." Social media, then, is central to personal expression but also to self-representation. As Nancy Thumim notes, '[s]elf-representation is taking place across all kinds of media and cultural spaces at a time when it is widely acknowledged that there can be no self without mediation' (2012: 51). While the previous chapter dealt with intense anxieties associated with this inability to separate the self from media, here it is recognised as a part of everyday culture.

In the final season of *Girls* Hannah secures a job writing for an online feminist publication called *Slag Mag*, which becomes the focus of several episodes, including the aforementioned 'American Bitch' (Season 6, Episode 3). This also enables the metanarrative invoking trenchant critiques of Dunham and her work to continue. In a

meeting with her editor, Hannah revels in the opportunity to express herself online: "I give zero fucks about anything, yet I have a strong opinion about everything, even topics I'm not informed on" (Season 6, Episode 1, 'All I Ever Wanted'). Such scripting seems to mirror familiar critiques of celebrity feminism, thought to offer an oversimplified and watered-down version of feminist messages (for example, Gay 2014c, Kilpatrick 2015, Zeisler 2016). Gay concedes that the broadening of gender equality via celebrity figures is positive, but not 'while avoiding the actual work of feminism' (Gay 2014c). Supposedly for Dunham, however, 'feminism *is* my work' and 'means everything' (in Gay 2014b). This assessment of her professional life and her politics as one in the same is legible by Dunham's use of the social media platform, Instagram. Posting images of feminist literature, quotations, icons, art, and political content on a daily basis, it is clear that feminism is present and informs different aspects of her professional life. As P. David Marshall identifies in reference to Twitter, such platforms become key vehicles for 'the staging of the self as both character and performance' (2010: 40).

Instagram has proven to be an outlet for pushing Dunham's affiliations with political organisations like Planned Parenthood, as well as her presence on the campaign trail for Hillary Clinton in the run-up to the 2016 presidential election. Nash and Grant note how Dunham's formal partnering with Planned Parenthood during her 2014 book tour in the USA continues the second wave feminist mantle of the 'personal is political' by educating women and men about their reproductive rights and other prevalent health issues (2015: 980). This would seem to prove consistent with her continued work elsewhere: Dunham dedicated her op-ed piece in *The New York Times* to voice her concerns about the ways in which the current political context is threatening women's reproductive freedom; accusing the Trump administration of denying women access to birth control and other medication 'under murky notions of moral disdain' (Dunham 2017). Some of Dunham's personal relationships are also influenced by her dedication to this feminist cause. This is perhaps most succinctly illustrated in the below image (Figure 3.2) of her friend and reproductive rights activist, before heading to a Lady Parts Justice event.

Dunham herself 'wears her feminist politics on her sleeve' when marketing a pink t-shirt for Planned Parenthood, emblazoned with 'Lena loves Planned Parenthood' in the same font as that on her book's cover (Taylor 2016: 253). Other celebrity feminists modelled the t-shirt for photographs on Dunham's Instagram, including her *Girls* co-star and friend Jemima Kirke, as well as actors Ellen Page and Amy Poehler. As Taylor notes, the t-shirt functions as an 'authorial epitext' which shores up the feminist credentials of Dunham's book; this reaffirms multiple feminist identities, while increasing the visibility of Planned Parenthood (2016: 254). On the other hand, these 'explicitly feminist celanthropic interventions' are complicated by the foregrounding of commodities inherent within such promotional mechanisms (Taylor 2016: 254; see also Turner 2004). Defined as 'the voluntary participation of celebrities in humanitarian fundraising, publicity awareness and charity building', the effects of celanthropy on the celebrity brand can be positive, demonstrating a commitment to activism and a social conscience (Rojek 2012: 67-69). But as Jo Littler argues in her analysis of celebrity altruism and charity, the 'hyperindividualism' of the celebrity is structurally antithetical to democracy in that it highlights and exacerbates the gulf between their personalised wealth and the social inequalities elsewhere (2008: 246).

The press and media attention centred on the charitable work of a star, as Dyer argues, 'can *only* be posed in terms of *the star doing it*, the extraordinariness or difficulty of her/his doing it, rather than in terms of the ostensible political issues involved' (1998: 78 [original emphasis]). This makes glaring the double standard, hypocritical position of celebrity charity: 'that it is presented as a selfless, modest act but is obviously being used to help the celebrity persona' (Littler 2008: 244). Dunham's association with Planned Parenthood for part of her book tour is entangled with her commercial efforts. As she admits in her op-ed piece regarding financial cuts to the organisation, her privilege shelters her against such threats: 'I can continue to do my job […] work directly with doctors to ensure my disease is controlled, and feel the support of millions when I am let down by my body' (Dunham 2017). Here, however, Dunham's '"real" and "intimate" lives coincide within this narrative' (Littler 2008: 238), via her role as an actor and celebrity tied

to a non-profit organisation; thus imbricating this identity with her life experience as a woman. The familiar dichotomy of ordinary/ extraordinary in relation to the famous persona is at play (Dyer 1998, Dyer 1986), arguably curtailing to some degree the structural distance between Dunham and her audiences.

Figure 3.2. 'The Personal is Political'. https://www.instagram.com/p/8HTZsgC1In/

As Littler argues, the 'affective resonance' of this expression of *understanding* towards the 'social weakness' of hyperindividualism, as well as 'the *performance* of the internalisation of social anguish', attempts to '*gesturally* redress the insecurities of the system' (2008: 247-48 [original emphasis]). Dunham's intimate self-disclosures may not confront the material implications of these structural inequalities, and how her own wealth and star status contributes to these spaces of suffering, but her 'confession of *truly* caring' at least 'attempts to present itself as a plugging of the gap' (Littler 2008: 248 [original emphasis]). In this sense, with Dunham's personal experience arguably driving her 'explicitly feminist celanthropic interventions', the symbolic and political importance of this facet to her persona cannot be so easily dismissed (Taylor 2016: 254). Correspondingly, as I have examined in this chapter, Dunham's feminist position is framed through a

creative synthesis between her writing and performance, creatively blurring her persona with her fiction, so that the personal feeds into the important representational work that *Girls* is doing. Moreover, the conversations and debates that Dunham's celebrity continues to provoke, reinforces her cultural capital, which elevate feminist ideas (albeit problematically in some instances). Social media is another means through which Dunham can maintain her visibility and extend her feminist narrative and performance.

Alice Marwick and danah boyd note the importance of social media within the wider 'performative practice' of celebrity in maintaining and constructing image and popularity (2011: 140). Dunham uses the spaces to write about her personal life, adopting a confessional mode of address that arguably reveals 'an intense and innate vulnerability that constitutes another kind of public stripping' (Murray 2017: 6). Indeed, platforms such as Twitter allow for a certain level of closeness and familiarity between the celebrity and their followers, facilitating, albeit strategically managed, self-disclosure and a 'performative intimacy' through its different modes of address (Marwick and boyd 2011: 147-48; see also Muntean and Petersen 2009). Tweets, retweets, photos, and videos, enable "access" to the "authentic" person behind the public image (Marwick and boyd 2011: 140); a desire that is key to the fascination with celebrity culture. Writing specifically about Instagram elsewhere, Marwick argues that it is a fairly 'open-ended social media tool' compared to Facebook, as self-presentation is not restrained within a rigid profile structure, providing its users with a variety of ways to represent themselves (2015: 138). This medium privileges *visual* self-expression and thus easily accommodates the 'visual iconography of mainstream celebrity culture', such as luxury lifestyles, selfies, designer clothing, and other branded items (Marwick 2015: 139).

Dunham's authenticity can be seen tied to her affect and physicality on *Girls*, with her online presence feeding into her complex persona, offering content about her celebrity lifestyle and behind-the-scenes access to her professional projects (Woods 2015). As in *Girls*, Dunham openly reveals different parts of her semi-naked, "non-normative" body via Instagram, perhaps highlighting a particular outfit, accessory, or a new tattoo, as well as to share more intimate details regarding her health. In the context of social media, personal

disclosure and intimacy are normative practices (Marwick and boyd 2010) but as part of Dunham's wider feminist performance, I suggest, these practices are nonetheless significant. Using her body as 'a tool to tell the story' (Dunham 2014: 102), Dunham utilises Instagram in order to extend this important creative choice. For Dunham, the platform is another means of "speaking through images" (Dunham in Vanity Fair 2015) to communicate her personal values and wider political stance – a promotion of choice, a strong sense of self, and encouraging bodily and reproductive freedom.

Figure 3.3. Lena Dunham, body selfie. https://www.instagram.com/p/BVYpX2vFITW/

Selfies, in particular, are a common means through which celebrities can harness their fame, advertising and curating themselves via social media (Marwick 2015: 142). Recent scholarship on selfies has identified them to be a significant cultural artefact and social practice, providing 'a way of speaking', often functioning as a 'gesture' which can carry particular messages to individuals, communities and audiences (Senft and Baym 2015: 1589). Selfies are also considered an important element of identity work and the

construction of authenticity in online environments (Lobinger and Brantner 2015). Correspondingly, co-founder of Instragram, Kevin Systrom, suggests that his platform enables “an authentic voice” and a “consistent perspective” (Systrom in Vanity Fair 2015). As illustrated by the image above (Figure 3.3), Dunham uses the platform to display her physicality via selfies of her body. A similar ‘low-key aesthetic’ largely consistent with the ‘blank style’ of *Girls* (Ford 2016: 1034) can be seen in the graininess of the image, with the creases and curves of her body highlighted by natural light and shadow. As a practice, selfies of the body can be seen as a way that women may understand and experience their own bodies (Tiidenberg and Cruz 2015: 81). The accompanying caption can be seen to exhibit Dunham’s understanding/ experience in relation to her body as she reflects on the ways she has proudly used it as part of her art, often refracting criticisms of her physical form using humour: ‘I performed the insult so no one else could.’ The pears and pot of honey emojis used to cover the more intimate parts of her body keep the image within the boundaries of Instagram’s community guidelines but also imbue it with a sense of humour.

Like her character Hannah, Dunham is the subject of a self-regulative, ‘panoptical vigilance’ (Bell 2013); a consequence of a postfeminist culture that insists on policing and shaming the female body (Bordo 1993, Holmes and Negra 2011, Ford 2016: 1037). As Ford notes: ‘The body politics of *Girls* are inherently informed by and in dialogue with discussions of Dunham’s body’ (2016: 1037). These articulations are made visible through Dunham’s presentation of her body on Instagram. Like Hannah, Dunham recognises that she does not meet the ideal sold by postfeminist popular culture but, at the same time, she refuses to aspire to such ideals (Ford 2016: 1037). Indeed, being naked in a public way is not an allowed practice for everyone, especially not for those whose bodies transgress the cultural norms of appearance (Tiidenberg and Cruz 2015: 91). Although existing hierarchies of fame are reinscribed in the medium of Instagram through visual iconography of celebrity (Marwick 2015: 141), selfies of Dunham’s body can arguably teach ‘new ways of seeing’, creating a productive context for more content that is ‘resistant’ to normative ideals of femininity (Tiidenberg and Cruz 2015: 86). Dunham’s

Instagram, I argue, becomes another platform through which she makes visible her negotiations of feminist and postfeminist politics, with her body as a key site for this performative work. In each of the cultural texts informing this thesis, questions have emerged about the nature of the public gaze which centralises girls. Like all the figures discussed here, Dunham is both 'looked at' and 'seen' through various media. More than this, however – whether in character or not – Dunham productively *claims* the 'looked-at-ness' of her body for a particular purpose. Specifically, she uses her body and the attention which it provokes in order to unpick the gendered politics associated with looking and being looked at.

Anne Helen Petersen uses the lens of 'unruliness' to examine Dunham's resistance to, and rejection of, the Western ideals of femininity that are rooted in self-regulation, improvement, and self-modification (2017a: 220). Hannah's 'unruly and uncompliant' body on *Girls*, argues Petersen, reiterates her character's lack of '"together"-ness' but also serves as a vehicle for abjection (2017a: 222-27). Dunham seeks to examine the audience's reaction to this, thereby confronting the cultural understandings underpinning notions of which bodies are thought to be worthy of desire (Petersen 2017a: 222-27). Petersen cites the negative reactions from audiences and commentators towards Hannah's coked-up frolics wearing a yellow mesh top that exposed her braless breasts in much of 'Bad Friend' (Season 2, Episode 3), which clearly demonstrates the disconnect between the way others see Hannah and the way she sees herself (2017a: 223). Dunham's Instagram, therefore, is an important extension of this work: 'through the control of the camera and caption, she directs and recontours the gaze. Instead of perfecting her body, she underlies the power of not doing so' (Petersen 2017a: 228). Herein lies the power of this particular medium; by claiming her 'looked-at-ness', Dunham invites us to see her as she sees herself.[29]

Of course, for a celebrity, this level of exposure and self-disclosure does have its consequences. As Marshall argues, online platforms facilitate presentation of the '*public*

[29] Twitter is also a space wherein Dunham posts selfies, but rarely, if it all, do these include her (naked/ semi-naked) body. Instagram, as a medium privileging images, with no character restrictions for captions, is a space conducive to the 'socially media body' (Warfield et al. 2016: 1).

private self', wherein celebrities appear to engage with a 'new notion of the public that implies some sort of further exposure of the individual's life' (2010: 44 [original emphasis]). As such, it is the 'personal self' – the willingness to make public the aspects of the self that were once deemed 'private' – that are easily a target (even if the personal self-inscribed may be fictional). The perils of online expression are clearly gendered and have intensified considerably in recent years, with the Internet liberating female voices while simultaneously opening them up to largely un-policed sexism and misogyny. As the 2014 GamerGate controversy made terrifyingly public, the toxicity of cyber warfare poses very real and potentially life-threatening consequences for women who simply voice their opinions online (see Stuart 2014). Emma A. Jane uses the term 'e-bile' to describe the 'extravagant invective, the sexualized threats of violence, and the *recreational nastiness* that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse' (2014: 532 [original emphasis]). This hostility, although constructed rhetorically, relies heavily on profanity, invective, and hyperbolic imagery of graphic, sexualised violence that has arguably become normalised (Jane 2014). Likewise, Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate M. Miltner refer to this as 'networked misogyny'; a phenomenon of gendered and raced violence, and hostility in online spaces, indicative of 'a new era of the gender wars' (2016: 171).

As Joanne Garde-Hansen and Kristyn Gorton note, intimacy is 'opened out' online so that the private sphere and women's bodies are objects of public/ private scrutiny and entertainment (2013: 155-56). Further, Su Holmes and Diane Negra argue that the circulating capacities of the Internet further intensify the emphasis on corporeal/ sexual surveillance of female celebrities (2011: 7). Petersen uses etymology in order to unpack the strong emotional reaction to Dunham's body, arguing that it is her willingness not to be nude but to be *naked* that should compel shame: 'The naked body is raw, without pretense, bare; the nude is nakedness refined […] filtered through the eye of the artist – an eye that, for the history of Western culture, has almost always been male' (2017a: 212). Dunham's power, therefore, comes from her refusal to attend to such historically and ideologically entrenched notions; instead exercising control over her own body and resilience in the face of this shared hatred (Petersen 2017a: 228). Dunham has, however,

voiced her concerns about the emotional labour of dealing with this incessant online hate and bile. The sheer weight and magnitude of these attacks have made her feel 'unsafe', leading to a partial (albeit temporary) retreat from Twitter (see Ledbetter 2015). Elsewhere, she has described the affects of this vitriol as "psychically depleting" (Dunham in Vanity Fair 2015).

Despite her concerns, Dunham still engages with and champions the personal/ public modes of online communication and performance allowed for by Instagram. According to Dunham it "allows for a fuller story to be told", with the lack of a word limit on captions and comment responses creating "a healthier and slightly less toxic dialogue" than familiar elsewhere on the Internet (in Vanity Fair 2015). Dunham often accompanies images with lengthy captions that directly address this culture, denying the 'tyranny of silence' sometimes associated with speaking out against 'e-bile' in fear of perpetuating its intensity and affects (Jane 2014: 536). In effect, I argue, Dunham is (re)negotiating this mediated space by giving equal emphasis to captions as she does to images, which works primarily to 'intensif[y] the importance of visual self-presentation' (Marwick 2015: 143). Reposting an untouched image of herself that appeared on the cover of *Glamour Magazine* in February 2017, for example, in the accompanying lengthy caption, Dunham recognises her very presence here as undermining the deeply entrenched cultural assumptions connected to the ideal female body: 'Whether you agree with my politics, like my show or connect to what I do, it doesn't matter – my body isn't fair game […] Haters are gonna have to get more intellectual and creative with their disses in 2017'.[30] Rather than being symptomatic of mere 'phatic communication' identified across digital media culture generally (Miller 2008), then, Dunham's labour on this platform should be recognised for its important feminist interventions and the resistance that it represents. Especially given that 'the body is *the* key terrain upon which discourses surrounding female celebrity are mapped' (Holmes and Negra 2011: 7 [original emphasis]).

Dunham's role in popularising messages of resistance in relation to her own celebrity agenda, however, ultimately complicates her feminist position. A plethora of

[30] Image available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/BOz1Ce-lwMF/, last accessed 7 July, 2017.

images on her Instagram, from various photo-shoots, magazine covers, press features, and appearances, extend Dunham's intertextual reach to provide various entry points through which to access and, indeed, *consume* her work and that of those she promotes. Dunham's semi-naked form wearing matching Calvin Klein lingerie, for example – even if for the purpose of sharing her physical and emotional experience to her followers – is a form of self-presentation, or indeed, self-*promotion*.[31] As discourses about postfeminism and neoliberalism attest, the embodiment of feminism by celebrities forges an individualism that often privileges certain voices, narratives, corporations, and campaigns, 'positioning consumerism or skill-building as panaceas for an ideological and structural issue' (Jane 2014: 171). As McRobbie argues, Dunham 'inscribes herself within, and implicitly subscribes to, those cultural norms which celebrate the seeming gains of young white womanhood' wherein 'the overall ethos is that of privilege, and of the need for success as confirmation of the self' (2015: 15). While pushing content from a variety of different feminist voices, Dunham's Instagram also features selfies with renowned celebrity feminists, such as Gloria Steinem, Hillary Clinton, and Taylor Swift; thus reiterating her ties with the derided notion of white feminism.

The raced and classed nature of her online engagements with digital public(s) also reinforces longstanding accusations against Dunham's elevated sense of entitlement and the apparent racial blindspot in her interactions. Coupled with the lack of diversity in *Girls*, reflections of her privilege manifested in these other mediated arenas arguably further distances people and women of colour from Dunham's feminist narrative. Indeed, she has shown some 'liberal sensitivity' towards the valid criticisms levelled against her by introducing some black characters to her otherwise whitewashed cast (McRobbie 2015: 15). Furthermore, and as with *Girls* itself (described above), the publicness of online conversations surrounding Dunham may also function as effective 'teaching moments' by elevating and enabling productive feminist debate about issues of privilege and intersectionality that are inherently complex in the current moment (Thelandersson 2014: 528). In this way, feminism is much like celebrity: 'an aspect of culture which is constantly

[31] Image available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/7t-j39C1Ib/, last accessed 9 July, 2017.

being reinscribed and reformulated' (Marwick and boyd 2011: 140; see also Turner 2004: 4). As Brady notes, what a feminist image or identity might mean is dependent on the cultural formation of celebrity and the specific intertextual references that are invoked, and thus it is the impossibility of capturing these multiple meanings in a definitive narrative that is the actual work of celebrity feminism (2016: 439). Correspondingly, Sara Ahmed maintains that a principal part of the work of feminism is in the 'working out': 'Where there is hope, there is difficulty. […] Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through' (2017: 2). In this sense, I argue that Dunham's digital labour across different platforms makes such feminist work clearly visible, and much like her other creative projects, attends to the messiness of the personal and the political.

On the other hand, Dunham makes no apologies for capitalising on her celebrity status to further her cause. She accepts in no uncertain terms that her entire performance is anchored by an ethos of privilege and celebration of a forwarding of the feminist cause alongside her commercial successes. More unsettlingly perhaps, Dunham asks that *we* accept this. Indeed, it is part of her brand that we do so. As the tagline of her Instagram once read, she is only 'Doing her best with what she's got'; intimating an acknowledgment of the failings inherent in her self-presentation and the commercialised spaces within which she works.[32] It is exactly this urge for publics to accept these failings that places Dunham's feminism in an uneasy relation with feminist scholars. Tensions are highlighted by McRobbie, who questions the status of Dunham's achievements, seeing them as complicit with a 'cultural appropriation of feminism' in line with 'the deeply individualizing forces of modern times' (2015: 16). Accepting of the performative practices of celebrity, such as allowing herself to become subject of tabloid press and their often gendered editorial comments, Dunham seems to have fully submitted to celebrity culture (McRobbie 2015: 14). I would argue, in contrast, that the way in which Dunham co-opts tabloid images, for instance, by re-posting them to her Instagram profile, along with captions that subvert their intended meanings ('Was literally psyched about the paparazzi photo so I

[32] Image available at: https://www.instagram.com/lenadunham/, last accessed 25 February, 2016.

would have evidence of it [her outfit] #thanksforthehelpcreepyguyintruckerhat'), [33] demonstrates more of an active role in the construction of her own celebrity image than the term complicit would suggest. Paparazzi photographs signal a sense that the celebrity has 'lost control' of their image (Jerslev and Mortensen 2016: 249), but Dunham reclaims control of how such images are seen via Instagram. Once again, the work of her feminist performance is rendered visible through the lens of celebrity, as Dunham publicly negotiates the terms of how her body is represented. Like Lawrence's engagement with the paparazzi (Chapter 2), Dunham works to disrupt their gaze. However, while Lawrence expresses a certain level of discomfort in relation to how she is seen via these pervasive channels, Dunham explicitly claims her 'looked-at-ness' in order to refract the gendered effects of the paparazzi's gaze.

As well as showing some resistance to the practices of the press and tabloid media, Dunham and Konner's *Lenny Letter* offers a similar refraction of gendered notions such as over-sharing. It can be argued that Dunham's work facilitates a level of female intimacy that engenders discomfort and disgust, which extends to her online performance and the way she uses social media to share personal information that seemingly 'risks breaking down ideas of propriety altogether' (Sykes 2015). Dunham roundly rejects the gendered connotations of the term 'TMI', bracketing its use as an attempt to police female narratives: 'what exactly constitutes too much information? [...] I feel as though there's some sense that society trivializes female experiences. And so when you share them, they aren't considered as vital as their male counterparts' (Dunham in Fresh Air 2014). *Lenny* buttresses Dunham's fight against such sentiments by completely rejecting them in its premise: 'We'll be allowed to show the ugly and complicated thought processes that go into forming your own brand of feminism, and your own identity, because it's not all clean back here' (Dunham in Petersen 2015). Embracing feminism in a commercialised form, however, has meant that such initiatives also come with a price tag.

[33] Image available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/9R3TWVC1C-/, last accessed 25 February, 2016.

Originally launched in September 2015, the email newsletter began as an independent feminist project funded by its founders, but has since partnered with Hearst Digital Media – the business and information conglomerate, who own notable women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, Elle,* and *Harpers Bazaar*.[34] Subscription to the website and its twice-weekly e-letter is still free but the buy-out remodels *Lenny* as a media brand, generating revenue from advertising, pushing branded content to readers, and distributing the newsletter across Hearst's various touchpoints (Peterson 2015). In a bid to extend the site's e-commerce further still, *Lenny* also launched their own online store, selling logo t-shirts, lettered 'feminist' bunting, 'Dismantle the Patriarchy' clothes patches, and nail art.[35] Such products are made and supplied by several grassroots women's businesses, which could be considered worthwhile causes to support from a feminist perspective.

But here, the 'doing' of feminism is naturalised and supplanted through commodification via 'the figure of woman as empowered consumer' (Tasker and Negra 2007: 2) – a hallmark of postfeminist popular culture (Gill 2007a, Gill 2007b). The co-option of feminism, by equating women's liberation with consumer choice, has arguably dogged the feminist movement since its inception, leveraging women's liberation into a marketplace of self-actualised femininity and popular girl figures (Zeisler 2016: 3-28). Such affiliations are, according to Konner, "ethical" and "affordable" practices of e-commerce, generating revenue streams in similar ways to established fashion blogging enterprises (Peterson 2015). Indeed, this is but one facet of *Lenny*, a project that largely reinforces Dunham (and Konner's) ability to reach a global, *millennial* audience.

As Taylor proposes, Dunham and Konner ought to be commended for their recognition of how the circulation of feminist material, however broadly this is defined, is heavily reliant on these kinds of commercial and technological arrangements (2016: 259). These corporate, cross-platform engagements are financially necessary to sustain such uses of the Internet, but this also substantiates claims that new media cannot exist

[34] See: https://www.hearst.com/magazines/digital-media, accessed 11 July, 2017.
[35] See: http://lennyletter.kungfustore.com/all-products.html, accessed 11 July, 2017.

independently in ‘a utopian space’ outside or beyond older forms (Taylor 2016: 259). As Henry Jenkins expounds in his work on the collision of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, this ‘convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content’, content that is circulated across different media systems, competing media economies, and national borders (2006: 3). This depends heavily on the ‘active participation’ of the consumer as they are courted across multiple media platforms (Jenkins 2017: 3). Dunham and Konner’s approach appears to have been recognised for its negotiation of these cultural parameters, with Hearst choosing to partner with *Lenny* because it is ‘a media brand for an active, intelligent, motivated, millennial audience’ (Peterson 2015). This partnership seeks not only to cater to a tech-savvy audience, but to utilise their various modes of cultural participation. Thus, *Lenny’s* convergence with Hearst’s established publishing platform potentially opens up their readership to those who do not subscribe to the newsletter service; instead offering entry points to their content via other international publications.

In terms of *Lenny’s* content more specifically, the idea of building a virtual community rests in its function as ‘a repository for many different voices’ (Dunham in Vanity Fair 2015), with their readers united by a wish ‘to make the world better for women and the people who love them’ (in Bonner 2015). Pitching politics, fashion, beauty, and popular culture, led to questions about what *Lenny* would bring to the table that cannot be found elsewhere in print and on the Internet (Petersen 2015), with one commentator writing of the pointlessness of such a project when ‘the “Dunhamisation” of popular culture is progressing at a rapid pace’ (Robertson 2015). Amplifying points of view that break through the cultural status quo should be priority, argues Robertson, rather than such ‘curated feminist content’ (2015). While Dunham’s celebrity capital underscores *Lenny’s* viability and visibility (Taylor 2016: 256), and with her ‘celebrity ecology’ (Brady 2016) supposedly responsible for securing essays from Hollywood stars like Jennifer Lawrence and an interview with Hillary Clinton, the newsletter and expanded website gives prominence to a myriad of women, interviews, and lifestyles.

The ‘Lenny Books’ imprint, for example, gives emerging writers a platform for their fiction and non-fictional works.[36] Also worthy of mention is that *Lenny* does not allow for comment sections that can foster gendered hostility, or ‘e-bile’ (Jane 2014), but is predicated on creating a community via common experiences of reading, viewing, and listening – forming an escape from the digital world (Petersen 2015). Dunham hopes that *Lenny* will serve as a reminder in this way ‘that the internet has the power to take you into quiet places – something we don’t usually use it for’ (in Petersen 2015). In this sense, *Lenny* is about fostering ‘a different type of feminist discourse’ that invites people in and refuses online conversations about feminism that can be ‘circular and limiting and exclusive’ (Petersen 2015). Continuing to use the Internet as a resource, then, Dunham further demonstrates her awareness of how understandings of feminism are increasingly shaped by their virtual manifestations. Through *Lenny* she seeks to (re)negotiate these mediated spaces to facilitate and remobilise debates about different feminisms and female experience.

Dunham’s objectives arguably fit with the contemporary online activism that some have termed to be part of a fourth wave of feminism (for example, Valenti in Solomon 2009, Cochrane 2013, Knappe and Lang 2014, Keller and Ringrose 2015, Baer 2016), which can be ‘characterised by a sharing of voices, engagement with global politics and a focus on intersectionality’ (Retallack et al. 2016: 2). For Dunham, *Lenny* is an opportunity to acknowledge that ‘[t]here are many different types of feminisms, and we can work together’ (in Petersen 2015). Seemingly speaking to the ‘messy’ networks of multiple voices with different interests and agendas that have ultimately complicated ‘the ideal unified collective’ that feminism can be imagined to be (Keller 2012: 433), Dunham’s digital projects, including her *Women of the Hour* podcast, serve as an invitation to those who have felt excluded from her previous largely white, privileged narratives. There are, however, a number of caveats which test the feminist potential of these projects. Such spaces may not be available to everyone; these are spaces that are hosted by Dunham, which capitalise on the ‘affective’ power of a privileged, personal narrative, which further

[36] See: http://www.lennyletter.com/lenny-books/, accessed 11 July, 2017.

marginalises certain voices and eclipses the work of ordinary activists – a problem that Alison Phipps (2016) identifies across contemporary feminist politics more broadly. Both *Lenny Letter* and *Women of the Hour* are, in effect, asking marginalised voices to do the work of disseminating ideas in this space. Furthermore, the idea of a liberal, unified feminism within these spaces might also be a problematic assessment in light of the way that certain voices have traditionally been excluded from this liberal pluralism (see hooks 1984).

Taylor argues, for instance, that in their attempts to revitalise feminism via *Lenny*, Dunham and Konner notably refuse to differentiate themselves from their feminist foremothers, opting instead to showcase second wave voices like Gloria Steinem, as well as employing postfeminist/ third wave rhetoric and its celebration of feminised cultural practices (2016: 256-57). Not positioning themselves in terms of one or the other of these different wave models 'works to stage cross-generational conversations, thereby underscoring intergenerational commonalities rather than differences' (Taylor 2016: 257). Such conversations are becoming increasingly significant in the wake of feminism's ascendency in popular culture as we come to terms with what this might mean, and given the acknowledgement by many scholars 'that any notion of a productive feminism has to be generationally balanced' (Gill et al. 2016: 728). *Lenny* can be seen to be doing this work, 'provid[ing] a generational channel for a conversation, promoting the continuity of the history of the feminist struggle' (Murray 2017: 9).

According to Dejmanee, a reading of feminist waves as 'entanglements' rather than 'erasures' is something that popular feminism compels, as it is understood through cultural 'events' such as Beyoncé's 2014 MTV Video Music Awards performance, Emma Watson's UN 'HeForShe' campaign, and Dunham's *Girls* (2016b: 743). As such, feminist politics is often disseminated through women whose work, identities, and activism are embedded in popular culture, mainstream media, and consumerism (Dejmanee 2016b: 743). Of course, we are not seeing 'a perfect expression of feminist politics' through Dunham's inherently transmediated identity (Dejmanee 2016b: 744), but what we are

seeing are explicitly feminist interventions with a 'generative capacity' (Taylor 2016: 260) in this dynamic cultural moment.

Taking this into account, it is also worth considering the durability of such interventions; will the 'generative capacity' of contemporary feminist work be enough to continue and sustain its own revival in popular culture? Understood through cultural 'events' and 'moments' spearheaded by celebrities (Dejmanee 2016b: 743), is the feminism which exists within such popular sites only effective to the extent that it offers personal power through consumer choice? In the current moment, where postfeminism seems to have become 'the new normal' and neoliberalism has tightened its hold in contemporary culture (Gill 2017a: 609), it seems pertinent of feminist scholars to ask whether the 'productive irritation' keeping feminist discourse alive in popular culture (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 253), is generative politically, or whether this is simply taking advantage of feminism's (perhaps temporary) resurgence? As I have unpacked in this thesis, discussions regarding feminism as it is expressed in popular culture often come with questions about the social and political efficacy of its commercial and virtual manifestations – which can often be thought to be mere ephemeral forms of feminism.

On the one hand, the presence of feminism in online spaces has been acknowledged as positive in terms of its urgency and the scope of its discursive exchange (see, for example, Keller 2012, Aune and Holyoak 2017). As Rosemary Clark notes about the form of online activist practice known as 'hashtag feminism', this can be seen as 'the latest iteration in a long history of feminist conversation-expansion tactics that politicize personal experiences', bringing together a 'multiplicity of voices' towards a shared objective on social platforms like Twitter; a multiplicity of voices 'that demand recognition of differences across intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class, so that more effective coalition building might occur' (2014: 1109). Indeed, hastags function as an 'idenitifer or tag for fellow activists, as well as a way to track multiple uses of the same phrase' on a particular platform, helping to 'continue the conversation' about a particular issue or social justice initiative 'beyond the originating dialogue' (Stache 2015: 162).

Pulling back the lens, however, such practice can also be seen to produce an oversimplified analysis of particular events by sidestepping some of the critical tools that the feminist movement has provided: 'a deep engagement with history, understanding the entanglements of the local with the global, and exploring the unequal gendered relations of power' (Khoja-Moolji 2015: 349). As Shenila Khoja-Moolji suggests, 'strangers can form communities through affective ties' via hashtags, but such ties can be tenuous, with affective intensities sometimes encouraging a rearticulation of longstanding hegemonic narratives against women and other marginalised groups (2015: 349). Furthermore, as Lara C. Stache notes, hashtag campaigns also run the risk of simply recreating '"girl power" messages, where the language of feminism acts as a poor substitute for real political action' (2015: 163).

Recent scholarship on digital feminist activism, however, reveals a far more complex and nuanced account of the relationship between hashtag feminism and social change. The work of Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller, for example, suggests that there is little research about what hashtag feminism actually *does* (2018: 237). Interviewing some of those involved in perhaps one of the most high-profile examples of digital feminist activism – the #MeToo campaign – has shown hashtags to be 'doing meaningful and worthwhile work in building networks of solidarity' for survivors (2018: 238). More importantly, this kind of digital feminism is often assumed to require minimal labour while, in fact, the momentum of hashtag and other digital campaigns 'become subject to much mainstream attention, scrutiny and follow-on' after the initial conceptualization (Mendes et al. 2018: 239). Indeed, there is also an emotional toll that comes with the labour of these digital practices – both for those who help to curate them and those who participate in them (Mendes et al. 2018: 240).

I have tried to make a similar case for Dunham's feminist labour here. Her transmedia performance punctures the façade of postfeminism in creative ways – demonstrating how celebrity seeps through and beyond character to extend the arena of feminist debate across multiple platforms. Furthermore, her digital labour provides other visual and affective gateways to her political agenda. This account has also sought to

unpack the pitfalls of Dunham's approach, which bring to light the messiness of doing feminism while occupying a privileged and entitled subjectivity. Whether her feminism is part of a labour of caring, or simply a way to garner attention and thus further her visibility, is perhaps a question that can be more effectively addressed as Dunham progresses through her life and her career. For now, however, perhaps Dunham's polarising celebrity identity is all that she can tender in an economic system which offers personal power through consumer choice, and where 'doing your best' can be seen as a product of the partial and compromised progress allowed for under neoliberalism.

Conclusion: Greater Than the Sum of its Parts

In the December/ January 2015 issue of *Harper's Bazaar* magazine, Lena Dunham interviews Gloria Steinem. A photograph shows the two women, sitting arm in arm in the centre of a lush two-piece suite, decorated with evocatively printed cushions and throws. While adopting the aesthetics of a privileged, inherently white feminism that has become a marker of neoliberal postfeminism, the politics of the image not only reveal a generational difference between the two women, but the shared celebrification of their identities. Steinem's renown is easily aligned with 'blockbuster celebrity feminism', referring to 'women whose fame is the *direct product* of their feminist intervention into public discourse' (Taylor 2014: 75 [original emphasis], see also Taylor 2016). Augmented by her position as co-founder of *Ms. Magazine* in 1972, Steinem became a prominent voice during the second wave and has remained a key public feminist figure throughout her life, with her celebrity capital still apparent in today's culture (Hamad and Taylor 2015: 126). Her appearances on women-centred television series *The L Word* (2004-2009) and *The Good Wife* (2009-2016), as well as her recently published autobiography *My Life on the Road* (2015), further cement this celebrity epithet as she continues to capitalise on her renown and mainstream status.

Steinem's subscription to celebrity and the ways in which she performs her public feminist identity means that she is considered a controversial figure within the women's movement. Still criticised for her brand of upper class, white feminism by millennial

feminists, like Dunham, Steinem's own skill with media manipulation has ensured that her voice continues to 'culturally reverberate' (Taylor 2014: 76). As a 'feminist grammar' (Hemmings 2011: 1) becomes further embedded into popular discourses, and as celebrities increasingly assert their feminism in the mainstream via transmedia performances (Dejmanee 2016b: 743), the presumption that media engagement with feminism is inherently negative and apolitical is questionable (Hamad and Taylor 2015: 125). Through their affirmative positions in popular and mainstream media, often performed with a knowing and self-aware irony, Dunham and Steinem seemingly acknowledge the limitations to such critiques and attempt to force such debates further by asking, "what now?" (Bell 2013: 363). The implicit exclusions of diversity within such sites, however, still remain unchanged by their privileged self-declarations and further testify to the privileging of certain kinds of voices and 'feminist storytelling' (Hemmings 2011: 1) that have long plagued both the academy and more popular inflections of feminism throughout its generations.

Despite these issues, and despite parallels in their adeptness at using media to further their causes, Steinem's thoughts on what Dunham refers to as 'women's media', do point to generational shifts in popular feminism: 'obviously the Internet is a bright spot […] But we just need to remember that it's a medium, not a message' (in Dunham 2015). While evidently acknowledging the paths forged by previous waves of feminist activism, Dunham appears more optimistic about the potential of new technologies to continue this political work. *Girls* as a feminist text is enhanced by the articulations between Dunham's 'real' and fictional narratives, and as such, she has created a work that is evidently greater than the sum of its parts, and one that 'demands to be read in the broader context of [her] public feminist agenda' (Dejmanee 2016b: 743). Furthermore, it is perhaps these articulations in Dunham's writing and performance which helped to seal the fate of *Girls* as 'a generational document' (Woods 2015: 38). It is very much a text that is shaped by Dunham's persona, with her proposition that 'feminism *is* my work' (in Gay 2014b) evidently driving her multimedia narratives wherein her life and politics closely interweave.

Offering a discursive space both on and off screen, Dunham and *Girls* signifies a renewed imperative 'to advance the feminist adage that the "personal is political"' through acknowledgement of both past and present feminisms (Nash and Grant 2015: 988; see also Bell 2013). Going beyond mere postmodern appropriation of language (Shugart et al. 2001), Dunham's engagement with postfeminism via witty, trenchant self-critique, breathes new life into a concept that has arguably become boring and repetitive in its application (Whelehan 2010). Rather than simply embracing a popular identity as part of a celebrity movement with a familiar story, Dunham is attempting to change the narrative (Zeisler 2016: 136-37). While her work communicates its feminist position through a privileged, narcissistic, and ironic lens, what this analysis and others have shown, is that Dunham, and indeed, *Girls*, cannot so easily be dismissed as apolitical, no more than celebrity feminisms should be. Given that in the current moment we are experiencing feminism as 'a new luminosity in popular culture' (Gill 2016a: 1), Dunham's deliberately authoritative and very public identity contributes to this renewed visibility in significant ways.

As Ahmed reflects, 'living a feminist life' requires a political labour of insistence: feminist movement depends on our ability to keep insisting on the existence of that which we wish to bring to an end – a labour that we inevitably learn from (2017: 6). Most significantly, I argue, Dunham's work makes this important labour and learning visible; she is forthrightly held to account for the raced and classed nature of her persona and performance – which, in her own words, 'careens between wisdom and ignorance'.[37] Out of the messiness of negotiating a feminist identity on a public stage is the possibility for more inclusive, 'less toxic' conversations about crucial race issues, and of learning from these moments of 'teaching' and debate, particularly in online spaces (Thelandersson 2014: 528). Furthermore, Dunham continues to document the price of being insistent of her feminist values and 'unruly' femininity (Petersen 2017a) via Twitter, Instagram, selected publications, and interviews; thus foregrounding the 'emotional labour' and the conditions of this work that being a (female) celebrity inherently involves (Nunn and

[37] Image available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/BOQ0L8vl9gs/, accessed 11 May, 2017.

Biressi 2010). Indeed, in what new ways Dunham decides to contribute to the labour of feminism remains to be seen, but her public identity demonstrates the work of someone who 'is trying to grow publicly' (Konner in Bernstein 2017); thus illustrating the gendered demands of those exposed to fame – not to mention those who choose to use their fame to endorse feminism.

Dunham's candid, confessional mode via different media assists with the cultural blurring between herself and Hannah, both affirming and complicating the vision of "authentic" female experience she purports to represent in *Girls* and her wider performance (Woods 2015). As I have argued here, this multi-platform identity, existing within commercial sites conducive with celebrity, is exemplary of the 'messy' terrains through which feminism is becoming increasingly manifest. Given her acceptance of feminism in this commercialised, branded form (Clark 2014, Petersen 2015), and her continued labour towards shaping this, Dunham appears confident in occupying the grey areas of popular culture often informed by a neoliberal, postfeminist ethos. In *Girls*, as Stéphanie Genz (2017) observes, Hannah's authenticity is the most valuable commodity on sale in a post-recession context. Authoring her own experiences and life scripts through 'narcissistic narrativising', Hannah seeks to exploit her imperfections, corporeal and otherwise, in service of her own self-brand that ultimately must be legible and marketable within the terms of a recessionary brand culture (Genz 2017: 24-7). Likewise, Dunham capitalises on her own (feminist) identity, her biography, and the 'missteps' (Dunham 2014a) she makes along the way. As consumers we are encouraged to 'buy in' to her imperfections and accept these as part of her branded identity.

While she openly documents her misjudgements about race and privilege, and clearly articulates her understanding of the critical discourses that surround her, Dunham's public statements and apologies are also part of her profitable performance. In the case of *Girls*, Dunham has been responsive to critiques of whiteness, but as Hannah McCann notes, 'on the whole the show does not engage with critiquing the dominant ideological framework of late capitalism, that positions white middle-class status as the desirable yet unmarked norm' (2017: 93). Indeed, '*Girls* quite clearly refuses to be the

moral core of millennial feminism', rejecting common assumptions that women-centred texts provide all the answers, but it must be foregrounded that Dunham's 'controversially narrow' range of representation is incredibly jarring (Whelehan 2017: 33-4). Elsewhere, her engagements with digital publics on several occasions have displayed a troubling disregard for her racial privilege. Such contributions to symbolic violence against people of colour gravely undermine Dunham's self-evident feminist politics, which is further compounded by her willingness to embrace the benefits of the system that bolsters white supremacy. This ultimately leads us to question how such a commodified, narcissistic self-project can be reconciled with the collective objectives of a feminist movement.

Hannah Horvath and her friends may be forgiven for their self-obsession and individualism; the strong emotional reactions that such characterisation provokes gives licence to *Girls*' self-conscious criticality of the challenges facing millennials in a post-recession climate, as well as Dunham's attempts to resist the typified identifications and narrative coherence associated with postfeminist film and TV (Whelehan 2017: 40; see also Bell 2013, Grdešić 2013, Fuller and Driscoll 2015). But as Genz argues, we as viewers are ultimately confronted with the limited scope and potency of this very critique, in that Hannah's authenticity and immaterial labour are ultimately swallowed up by the structures of late capitalism, and thus: 'the girls might have no option but to forego their narcissistic authenticity in favour of a more productive and lucrative brand of individualism and critical compliance, symptomatic of a more intensified neoliberalism' (2017: 27-8). Likewise, Dunham's marketable persona and openly 'imperfect' brand of feminism can arguably only offer more variations of the same within these cultural and economic parameters. As Banet-Weiser argues, any critique of branding in advanced capitalism can only work to expand its ambivalence, which in itself is an integral element of self-brand management (2012: 92-3).

Moving forward, then, the emphasis on the individual rather than the collective, and a shift from a physical emancipatory movement to more digital projects, encapsulates many of the anxieties surrounding the future of feminism and the ways in which celebrity culture continues to shape this. As has been made clear in this chapter and in the

continued scholarship on *Girls* and its significance within the frame of contemporary feminisms, Dunham 'is not in the business of providing answers' but instead seems more focused on speaking to these generational struggles in new ways (Nash and Whelehan 2017: 5). As I have argued here, her creative (re)negotiation of mediated spaces (e.g. Instagram, *Lenny Letter*, and *Women of the Hour*) nonetheless holds promise by opening up a discursive space for feminist voices, requiring a revision of understandings of feminism as shaped by celebrity. Although Gay argues that '[f]eminism should not be something that needs a seductive marketing campaign' (2014a), Dunham is simply and unapologetically 'doing her best with what she's got'.

CONCLUSION

In an article published on *BuzzFeed* on 28 June 2017, Anne Helen Petersen suggests that the entertainment industry is currently experiencing what she calls 'The Great White Celebrity Vacuum'. She goes on to write: 'Within the industry of celebrity, white women have long been the primary currency. But in our current political and cultural climate, investing in them feels increasingly ill-advised. Could the long, oft-contested, and consistently fraught reign of white celebrity womanhood be coming to an end?' (Petersen 2017b). In the divisive political climate, star images of white women who once epitomised a central ground for opposing ideologies, providing a salve for tensions in a societal moment, now only seem to 'serve as inflammations' (Petersen 2017b). Indeed, many fail to capture the imagination in the same ways as they once did: image rebrands from Miley Cyrus and Katy Perry have arguably proven commercially unsuccessful, Brie Larson is just not scandalous enough (Petersen 2017b). Moreover, for A-listers like Angelina Jolie, Scarlett Johansson, and Jennifer Lawrence, they have all been involved in films that have received box office disappointment following certain public controversies surrounding their problematic narrative (for example, *Passengers* (2016)), and issues of whiteness (for example, *Ghost in the Shell* (2017)) (Petersen 2017b).

As such, in the process of reflecting on my research from this particular moment, it seems pertinent to think about what might have changed in terms of what the *white* girls in this study emblematise. When I began this project *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Hunger Games*, and *Girls* were already incredibly popular, but they would also come to be representations which I would map my own coming of age in relation to. As a project that began with a focus on the portrayals of girls on the cusp of womanhood, it is the whiteness of these identities, in particular, that has increasingly been brought to the fore as my research has progressed. The whiteness of the girls that are centred in these texts could not be ignored, but it is the accumulative impact of the continuing prominence of discussions about race and class in relation to these representations that means that these issues perhaps resonate more strongly now than they did when I began this

process. The question of whether there is 'something very "very" about whiteness', which Sara Ahmed wonders in relation to her own sense of exhaustion and alienation at her difference when often surrounded by whiteness (2017: 33, 54), is also pertinent to a popular, postfeminist culture dominated by white figures. Indeed, such a question is given a near disturbing resonance in relation to the aestheticised hyper-whiteness of fictional characters like Lisbeth Salander and the Capitol citizens, as well as Lena Dunham's marketable (white) feminism.

During the course of my research, *Girls* aired all of its six seasons on HBO between 2012 and 2017. In those five years, the narratives about growth and about making mistakes, that have often been the subject of controversy in the media, have been as much about Dunham as they have been about the characters that she created. In other words, when we talk about the whiteness of *Girls*, we are also talking about Dunham's whiteness. As Petersen argues: 'The dominance of female celebrities have always, in some way, been a testament to the endurance of white supremacy' (2017b). With this in mind, Dunham's very public uneven responses about the raced and classed nature of *Girls*, and her problematic personal engagements with digital publics, only work to intensify these problems, all the while still serving her own self-brand of imperfection.

Significantly, *Girls'* final season aired in a post-Trump America, which Dunham recognises as the confluence of an ending for this particular project but a beginning for the work that must continue in this challenging new era: 'I know that we as public women are going to have to fight harder than we ever have before' (in Wappler 2017). In the penultimate episode of the final season, in a long-awaited reconciliatory moment between Hannah and Jessa, Hannah accepts her friend's apology insisting that, "we were all just doing our best" (Episode 9, 'Goodbye Tour'). But as Jessa adds: "Our best was awful" (Episode 9, 'Goodbye Tour'). Although this exchange seems implicitly to acknowledge the somewhat flawed legacy that *Girls* leaves behind in a volatile political climate, as well as Dunham's wish to be recognised as someone who 'is trying to grow publicly' (in Bernstein 2017), the question remains, how effective is such a branded focal point in providing for the collective? (Murray 2017: 14). Simply 'doing our best' cannot be used as a means of

continuously justifying, or simply ignoring, the sometimes glib and innocuous actions by white celebrities that contribute to systematic inequalities. But perhaps such a notion – along with the construct of the girl who 'should-be-able-to-but-[doesn't]' (Fuller and Driscoll 2015: 257) – needs to be examined further as a possible symptom of a neoliberal system which allows for little else other than partial and compromised progress.

This *Girls* project has also coincided with something of a feminist revival in popular culture, or, as Sarah Banet-Weiser and Laura Portwood-Stacer suggest, 'a moment when feminism has undeniably *become* popular culture' (2017: 884 [original emphasis]). The commodification of feminism is not new to this moment. As scholars recognised of an earlier era, the morals and tensions associated with feminism and femininity have long been used as material for expanding and renewing the value of consumer goods (Goldman et al. 1991, Zeisler 2016). We have now reached a point, however, where we are not only dealing with feminism as 'complicit in the fetishism of commodities' but are now also having to make sense of the fact that 'the feminist critique of that phenomenon is also a highly visible commodity in the form of popular books, blogs, and Twitter accounts' (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2017: 885). As is brought into dazzling effect with regard to *The Hunger Games* franchise especially, the transmedia construction of its storyworld extends its simulation to the point where existing conceptual frameworks can no longer explain such phenomena. Indeed, in all three case studies, form and aesthetics are seemingly at odds with the moral messages of their feminist origins but are also prerequisite to an understanding of the affective power of these texts.

As I have argued, the texts that I have examined are not only a product of a complicated cultural moment but are product*ive* towards making sense of some of the tensions that define this complex cultural terrain. As feminist heroes and identities, they simultaneously exemplify both the potentials and the limits of feminism working within the boundaries of capitalist, neoliberal structures. As part of these systems, popular feminism sees market visibility as the solution to structural inequality, thus explicitly recognising inequalities along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality. However, it stops short of recognising, naming, or disrupting the political economic conditions that allow such an

inequality to be profitable (Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer 2017: 886). In many ways, the celebrity images of Lawrence and Dunham work to buttress certain elements of popular feminism, such as endorsing certain brands, in order to maintain their visible platforms. Neoliberal branding strategies are 'normalised' as 'part of the logic of a converged media culture that *demand* girls […] negotiate their feminist politics with an all-encompassing consumer culture' (Keller 2015: 280-81 [emphasis added]). Resonant stars like Beyoncé, Rihanna, Serena Williams, and Michelle Obama, among others, also utilise these means to further their feminist identities, but as Petersen argues, their image seems to be more 'representative of the future' in terms of the ways in which they explicitly or implicitly work through urgent issues of race, class, and gender; as opposed to those of some white celebrities, who arguably represent 'some anxious tether to the past', thus making them increasingly difficult to trust in and idealise in the current political climate (Petersen 2017b).

Some scholars, such as Sarah Projansky, have taken important epistemological approaches in their work to allow space for more marginalised representations of young women and girls (2014: 20). As she argues in her book entitled *Spectacular Girls: Media Fascination and Celebrity Culture*, Projansky's refusal to write about titles such as *Girls, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, and *Sex and the City*, is so as to resist 'postfeminist media culture's infantilization of women' and perhaps, more importantly, to make a 'political move' to claim girlhood for those, such as young women of colour, who are so often denied representation by media (Projansky 2014: 20). As I have worked through as part of these reflections on my research, the commodification of whiteness is an important point of contention in relation to my chosen texts but with the shifting cultural terrain and the ideologies underpinning white womanhood currently in flux (Petersen 2017b), the questions of race and class to which I respond have become more politically pressing. The recent changes that Petersen (2017b) identifies in her commentary of white celebrity are emerging issues that go beyond the scope of this thesis, but such insights do open up crucial avenues for future scholarship.

While my own case studies focus on texts that are incredibly successful, intensely visible, and privileged in postfeminist media culture, I have argued that their attendant gendered identities cannot be so easily categorised – as they often are – as universal. As Rosalind Gill suggests: 'One of the strengths of postfeminism as a critical concept is that it attends to and makes visible contradictions' and so engaging with these contradictions of media culture is an integral part of being a feminist scholar (2016b: 622). Certain contradictions, or 'entanglements' between feminist and anti-feminist ideas (McRobbie 2004, McRobbie 2009), are embodied and brought to the fore by the girls that I have referred to in this thesis. As I argue of the filmic adaptation of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2011) in Chapter 1, David Fincher's rendering of Lisbeth Salander not only foregrounds but commodifies her otherness – an otherness that shares affinities with sexism and misogyny – drawing attention to debates surrounding the moral efficacy of branding feminist messages. On the other hand, however, my analysis isolates how Fincher's focus on Lisbeth's performance of identity promotes a more equivocal reading; highlighting the gendered implications of her construction as a "victim" in both the original novel and Swedish film adaptation.

Even more explicitly elucidated in Chapter 2, *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015) film series brings into focus the ways in which cycles of fame and capitalism continually feed off themselves – thus threatening to engorge their own critical distance, and thus, the socio-economic critique at its core. Attempts to further the lucrativeness of this franchise continue, with news of a branded outdoor theme park due to open in South Korea in 2019. Lionsgate Movie World will feature a *Hunger Games* themed zone, comprised of restaurants, rides, attractions, replica streets and towns, and souvenir shops (see Cision PR Newswire 2017). As I have shown, Lawrence's stardom adds another layer to the almost grotesque quality of this commodification, negotiating her life in the limelight, but unlike Katniss Everdeen, Lawrence does not have to fight for her right to survive by killing other children. At the same time, however, the affective qualities of these texts are brought to the surface through Lawrence's authentic performance, helping to further

convey the political resonance given to feeling and emotion in the original literary narratives.

Also brought to the fore in my analysis of Lawrence's charismatic persona, are the tensions inherent in mediated authenticity at a time when identity needs to be injected with commodity value so as to function in the political economy. For polarising feminist identities like Dunham, explored in Chapter 3, the future for feminism is to be found by engaging these sorts of branding practices rather than resisting them. While there is considerable variance between these two famous figures and their roles in popular culture – notably that Dunham readily utilises entrepreneurial approaches to maintain and further her visibility (and her feminism), whereas Lawrence attempts to resist, to some extent, the pervasiveness of the public gaze into her private life – they both embody the shifts in this cultural terrain. These girls have grown up in an age of postfeminist media culture living in the shadow of the second wave, seemingly haunted by the ghosts of an 'undead feminism' (Munford and Waters 2014). Their coming of age is also intrinsically linked with the resurgence of an updated feminist politics, which is more of a 'formless, headless movement [that] resides in a whole world of texts, theories, events, books, films' and so on (McRobbie 2015: 16). What I have argued, here, is that these identities help to unpick the complexities of this moment.

Further, the performances central to each text draw attention to the gendered labour that is required as a condition of visibility in this political economy. Lawrence and Dunham are somewhat bound by their branded identities – and so are their associations with feminism – but how they work with what they have got can be recognised as, to use Jessalynn Keller's terminology, 'poking holes' in an otherwise daunting and oppressive media culture (2015: 282). The self-reflexiveness of their personas allows their ambivalence to strictures and logics of postfeminist media culture to 'bleed' into their creative performances, ascribing them with a heightened political and affective resonance. Lawrence's portrayal of an adoring wife in Darren Aronofsky's psychological horror film, *mother!* (2017) – a seeming allegorical narrative about 'the rape and torment of Mother Earth' (Lawrence in White 2017) – is significant to this end. Early popular critical

commentaries of the film, for instance, inevitably emphasise the 'complicated labour' involved in Lawrence's portrayal of childbirth (Kermode 2017) but also both the gruelling physical and emotional exertion she endured as part of her performance (see, for example, Brooks 2017). This could be interpreted as reinforcement of Lawrence's enduring star power but in light of my own analysis, moreover, I would argue that these observations about Lawrence's work lucidly speak to the affective depth of her craft. Indeed, as Beth Johnson's (2017) work shows, the physical and emotional labour inherent in the textual and extra-textual elements contributing to an actor's on-screen performance, can deeply 'move' audiences to think and to feel.

Beyond these affective capacities, however, the star images of both Lawrence and Dunham are still elevated and problematically informed by their white, middle-class, American status, the limitations of which are amplified by their, sometimes clumsy, negotiations upon acknowledging (or not) such a privilege. Nevertheless, the public nature of their images and these kinds of negotiations *do* accomplish important ideological work, in that they expound the 'personal and the messy' at the core of feminist politics (Thelandersson 2014: 529). Through the narrative that I have weaved throughout this thesis, then, I suggest that the identities performed in each text, put to work under capitalism, call attention to the on-going problems of reconciling individual projects with collective action – but in so doing – feminism is acknowledged as something worth labouring for.

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Ghost in the Shell (2017) Film. Rupert Sanders. dir. (USA: Paramount Pictures).

Girls (2012-2017) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: HBO).

Gone Girl (2014) Film. David Fincher. dir. (USA: 20th Century Fox).

Se7en (1995) Film. David Fincher. dir. (USA: New Line Cinema).

The Girl in the Spider's Web (2018) Film. Fede Álvarez. dir. (USA and Sweden: Sony Pictures).

The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet's Nest (2009) Film. Daniel Alfredson. dir. (Sweden: Yellow Bird).

The Girl Who Played with Fire (2009) Film. Daniel Alfredson. dir. (Sweden: Yellow Bird).

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2009) Film. Niels Arden Oplev. dir. (Sweden: Yellow Bird).

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2011) Film. David Fincher. dir. (USA: Scott Rudin Productions/ Yellow Bird/ Sony Pictures).

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (2012) DVD. David Fincher. dir. (USA: Scott Rudin Productions/ Yellow Bird/ Sony Pictures).

Gone Girl (2014) Film. David Fincher. dir. (USA: 20th Century Fox).

The Good Wife (2009-2016) Television series. Seasons 1-7. (USA: CBS).

Gossip Girl (2007-2012) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: The CW).

The Hills (2006-2010) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: MTV).

The Hunger Games (2012) Film. Gary Ross. dir. (USA: Color Force).

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire (2013) Film. Francis Lawrence. dir. (USA: Color Force).

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1 (2014) Film. Francis Lawrence. dir. (USA: Color Force).

The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 2 (2015) Film. Francis Lawrence. dir. (USA: Color Force).

The Jeremy Kyle Show (2005-) Television series. (UK: ITV Studios).

Joy (2015) Film. David O. Russell. dir. (USA: Fox 2000 Pictures).

Keeping Up with the Kardashians (2007-) Television series. Seasons 1-13. (USA: E!).

Kick-Ass (2010) Film. Matthew Vaughn. dir. (USA: Marv Films and Plan B Entertainment).

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) Film. Simon West. dir. (USA: Mutual Film Company).

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider – Cradle of Life (2003) Film. Jan de Bont. dir. (USA: Mutual Film Company).

The L Word (2004-2009) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (Canada and USA: Showtime).

The Mindy Project (2013-) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: Fox).

mother! (2017) Film. Darren Aronofsky. dir. (USA: Paramount Pictures).

New Girl (2012-) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: Fox).

Passengers (2016) Film. Morten Tyldum. dir. (USA: Columbia Pictures).

Queen Christina (1933) Film. Rouben Mamoulian. dir. (USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).

Sex and the City (1998-2004) Television series. Seasons 1-6. (USA: HBO).

Sex and the City: The Movie (2008) Film. Micheal Patrick King. dir. (USA: HBO Films).

Silence of the Lambs (1991) Film. Jonathan Demme. dir. (USA: Orion Pictures).

Silver Linings Playbook (2012) Film. David O. Russell. dir. (USA: The Weinstein Company).

This is England (2010-2015). Television series. Three instalments. (UK: Warp Films).

Tiny Furniture (2010) Film. Lena Dunham. dir. (USA: Tiny Ponies).

Titanic (1997) Film. James Cameron. dir. (USA: Paramount Pictures).

Winter's Bone (2010) Film. Debra Granik. dir. (USA: Roadside Attractions).

X-Men (2011-) Film series. (USA: 20th Century Fox).

Zodiac (2007) Film. David Fincher. dir. (USA: Paramount Pictures).

ANNEX: LETTER OF ETHICAL APPROVAL FOR FAN-WORK STUDY

Keele University

RESEARCH AND ENTERPRISE SERVICES

21st January 2015

Wallis Seaton
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Claus Moser Building

Dear Wallis,

Re: From girl next door to Mockingjay: Intersections of celebrity and girlhood in The Hunger Games (2012 – 2014) and its fandom

Thank you for submitting your application for review. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethics Review Panel. The following documents have been reviewed and approved by the panel as follows:

Document	Version	Date
Summary of Proposal	2	13/01/15
Email Invitation and Information	1	13/11/14

If the fieldwork goes beyond the date stated in your application, you must notify the Ethical Review Panel via the ERP administrator at uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

If there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on uso.erps@keele.ac.uk stating ERP1 in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

pp

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
Supervisor

Ref: ERP1220

20th January 2017

Wallis Seaton
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciencies
Claus Moser Building

Dear Wallis,

Re: 'From girl next door to Mockingjay: Intersections of celebrity and girlhood on The Hunger Games (2012-2014) and its fandom

Thank you for submitting your application to amend study, informing us of a change to the consent process. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved by the Ethical Review Panel.

The following document has been reviewed and approved by the Panel as follows:-

Document	Version	Date
Summary Document	3	16-01-2017

Just to remind you, if the fieldwork goes beyond the **20th February 2017**, or there are any other amendments to your study you must submit an 'application to amend study' form to the ERP administrator at research.governance@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail. This form is available via http://www.keele.ac.uk/researchsupport/researchethics/

If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me via the ERP administrator on research.governance@keele.ac.uk stating **ERP1** in the subject line of the e-mail.

Yours sincerely

pp C H Bonnerman

Dr Jackie Waterfield
Chair – Ethical Review Panel

CC RI Manager
Supervisor

Directorate of Engagement & Partnerships
T: +44(0)1782 734467

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